RAY

Unchain My Heart

by
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Director \ Producer
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Producers
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FADE IN:

OPENING CREDITS OVER...

1 EXT. JELLYROLL, FLORIDA (1935) - DAY 1

Glistening sunlight shines through a light rain falling on JELLYROLL, the poorest of the poor colored section of Greenville, a Florida/Georgia border town. Tin roofed cabins randomly sprinkled along a dirt road, lavish, overgrown vegetation behind. A buzzing sawmill competes with the thrumming of thousands of crickets.

A 4 yr. old colored boy, GEORGE ROBINSON, short pants, tee-shirt and *bare feet sits on the porch of the ramshackle Robinson's house.* GEORGE is singing a nursery rhyme.

GEORGE
Last night, night before, twenty-four robbers at my door...I got up an' let 'em in, hit 'em in the head with a rollin' pin

His mother, ARETHA ROBINSON hastily takes clothes off line. 'RETHA is 25, long silky black hair, frail and bone tired all the time. She moves quickly back up a well worn path, past her wash tub (MOUNTED ON A SAWHORSE).

ARETHA
Ray, boy, get up from there, it's startin' to rain!

We SEE YOUNG RAY CHARLES ROBINSON (5) as he lays with his ear pressed to the ground. RAY has on shorts, dirty tee shirt and bare feet, a mischievous twinkle in his eye. *(NOTE: RAY CAN SEE.)*

YOUNG RAY
In a minute, mama, I hear somethin'.

ARETHA
Boy, you ain't got no needle?

Ray shakes his head 'no'. Aretha, assured, moves into the house. *George jumps down from the porch and walks over to Ray.*

GEORGE
I know 'Last night, night 'fore.'

Ray rolls his eyes, gives him a look of 'so what'.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Whatcha doin'?

YOUNG RAY
Shhh.

Confused by Ray shushing him, George bends down.

GEORGE
(low whisper)
What is it?

YOUNG RAY
(perturbed)
See that sun shinin' up there?
(off George's nod)
Well, when the sun's shinin' and it's rainin', an' you put a pin in the ground - not a safety pin, an' for sure no needle!

GEORGE
Why?

YOUNG RAY
With a safety pin you can't hear nuttin'...but with a needle!

GEORGE
What?!

YOUNG RAY
The devil'll use that needle to jump up an' get ya! But if you put a straight pin in the ground while the sun's shinin' an' it's rainin' at the same time...you can hear the devil beatin' his wife.

George looks amazed. He slowly lowers his ear to the ground.

MARY JANE
'RETHA!

Ray and George jump, startled, thinking they had heard the devil. They turn to SEE MARY JANE and a neighbor woman named FANNIE. MARY JANE is black, 30's, a stout country girl.

MARY JANE (CONT'D)
Fannie's here to pick up her clothes!
(to Ray)
...Monkey Doodle, where's your mama?

YOUNG RAY
She's in the house, Mother.

MARY JANE
What're you an' George doin' out here in the rain?

YOUNG RAY
Listenin' to the devil.

MARY JANE
Lord Jesus! Boy, get up from there!

ARETHA (V.O.)
Mary Jane.

Aretha comes from the side of the house with a basket of clothes.

MARY JANE
'Retha, 'em children ain't got no needle, do they?

ARETHA
No, I gave 'em a straight pin...I was takin' down Eula's wash.

Fannie and Mary Jane exchange a look as Fannie pays Aretha.

FANNIE
Here's the money I owe you.
(takes clothes)
...but, I'm gonna let you in on a secret...Eula's cheatin' you. She was braggin' 'bout it at The Red Wing.

ARETHA
I ain't studyin' Eula.
(off Fannie's look)
...'sides, I've gotta take the work where I can find it.

FANNIE
Colored shouldn't steal from colored.

Mary Jane nods in agreement. Fannie leaves.

MARY JANE
Fannie had some more news - 'bout Bailey.

Aretha gives Mary Jane a stern 'shut your mouth' look.

ARETHA
Ray, you an' George run down to the store an' get a bag of brown beans.

Ray and George get up and run down the dirt road.

ARETHA
I told you not to talk 'bout Bailey 'round 'em boys!

MARY JANE
He's their daddy!

ARETHA
He ain't here! He ain't no daddy!

MARY JANE
Alright 'Retha, but Fannie was sayin' the railroad's movin 'im down to Shamrock an' he's taken Stella Mae 'cuz she's pregnant.
(off Aretha's look)
...you know she is - that's Bailey. He had you pregnant with Ray, an' me with Jabbo at the same time.

ARETHA
I ain't got time to talk 'bout Bailey.

Aretha goes into the house.

2 EXT. JELLYROLL \ HAMLET - DAY 2

Ray and George run into a dirt square, featuring a General Store, a Barber Shop and The Red Wing Cafe. Stopping at the General Store, Ray HEARS music from The Red Wing. George SEES look on Ray's face.

GEORGE
Ray, Mama told us to get some beans!

YOUNG RAY
(running towards music)
You go 'head.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: LONG SLENDER FINGERS POUNDING OUT BOOGIE-WOOGIE.

3 INT. THE RED WING CAFE - DAY 3

MR. PIT, a large black man, 40's, slicked back hair, commands the keyboard. Ray stares down in wonder at Mr. Pit's magical hands.

MR. PIT
(smiling)
Hey R.C., let me show you somethin'.

Mr. Pit stops playing and picks out three specific notes.

MR. PIT
Now play that.

Ray slowly plays the three notes. Mr. Pit starts to accompany him, smiling encouragement. Ray more confidently plays his notes. Now Mr. Pit cuts loose on a wild boogie-woogie, ~~incorporating~~ Ray's three notes as counterpoint. Ray, serious and diligent, keeps up his part - totally thrilled.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: ARETHA'S HAND SNATCHES GEORGE'S TINY WRIST.

CREAKY WITCH VOICE (V.O.)
Let me feel your wrist so I can see if you're tasty enough to eat.

4 INT. ROBINSON HOME - NIGHT 4

The Robinson home is lit by kerosene lamps, projecting Aretha's weird shadow onto the wall, resembling a creepy witch. George and Ray sit, mesmerized by Aretha acting out *'Hansel and Gretel'*.

ARETHA
...this is what you get for eatin' my gingerbread house...I'll burn you up.

Aretha pulls Ray towards the stove.

ARETHA
But brave Hansel, he's not gonna let the witch eat his sister, no sir!

She grabs George and pulls him toward her.

ARETHA
Hansel pushes the wicked old witch into the white hot fire an' slams the door.

Aretha screams and feigns falling into the fire.

ARETHA
...he and Gretel run out of the gingerbread house, as fast as they could, all the way home - the end.

George and Ray look drained from the excitement.

GEORGE
Tell us 'nother one, mama, please?

Aretha looks at George in disbelief.

ARETHA
Boy, you might not get tired...but your mama does...time for bed.

Aretha pulls back the hanging blanket around her bed and picks up the FAMILY BIBLE an OLD FRAYED WHITE BIBLE, one that holds family records and a $.25/month insurance policy. Ray and George strip to their underwear and get into a rollaway bed. She starts to read.

ARETHA
Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations, let thy work appear....unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children, from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.....

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: PRESSED WHITE SHEETS HIT THE DIRTY GROUND!

5 EXT. EULA'S HOME \ BACK PORCH - DAY 5

Outraged, EULA, overweight, 40's, black, turns on Aretha.

EULA
HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND?!

ARETHA
Eula, we agreed to split the money you made on a wash basket, fair and square! But you charged those white folks one thing, an' paid me 'nother!

EULA
Who's gonna wash these?!

ARETHA
You can! Now pay me my money!

For a moment, Eula thinks about not paying. Aretha steps forward and holds out her hand. Eula takes change purse from her bosom.

EULA
I'm gonna give you two dollars. But don't s'pect no more work outta me.

ARETHA
I got all I want outta you.

Aretha takes the money and leaves. Ray and George have to run to keep pace with their mother.

ARETHA
Scratch a liar, find a thief!...that's why I want y'all to learn to read an' write better'n me...so you don't have to live hand to mouth, understand?

YOUNG RAY
Yessum, mama.

GEORGE
Mama, I'm good with numbers.

ARETHA
Yes, George. You're smarter than some grown-ups when it comes to numbers.
(off George's smile)
...but the world's full of educated fools, don't you be one...you gotta use your common sense too, understand?

BOTH BOYS
Yessum, mama.

Entering their yard, the boys watch as an angry Aretha puts some clothes into her basket and goes into the house.

CUT TO:

6 EXT. ROBINSON HOME \ BACK YARD - MOMENTS LATER 6

We HEAR SQUEAKS of delight coming from the woods. SUDDENLY, Ray, laughing, runs out of the woods, being chased by George.

GEORGE
I got you! I got you!

YOUNG RAY
No you didn't! You missed me!

In frustration and exhaustion, George stops chasing Ray.

GEORGE
No, I got you Ray, stop cheatin'! You know what mama said 'bout cheatin'.

Ray stops running. He SEES George pouting.

YOUNG RAY
Okay, you got me.

George smiles, pleased. Ray lightly touches George.

YOUNG RAY
...but I got you back.

With that Ray is off and running. George is frustrated.

GEORGE
I ain't playin' tag no mo'.

George looks up at the wash tub and starts climbing the sawhorse.

GEORGE
Ray! Ray, look at me! I'm a giant!

Ray turns to SEE George - hands held high, tottering from one foot to the other.

GEORGE
Try to get me, Ray!

YOUNG RAY
You better get down from there 'fore mama sees ya.

George scoffs at Ray and prances around the edge of the tub. SUDDENLY, George loses his balance and tumbles head first into the tub. As George's feet kick and splash the water, Ray laughs.

YOUNG RAY
Some giant.

George frantically flails around, but Ray just stands there, confused, not knowing what to make of George's actions.

Aretha comes out with a basket of clothes. She SEES Ray standing paralyzed, staring into the rinse tub. She starts to call out to him when she SEES George face down in the water.

ARETHA
Dear God, no!

Aretha drops her basket, runs to the tub, and pulls George out of the water. She urgently tries to shake the water out of his lungs.

ARETHA
Breathe, baby...breathe for Mama.

Hope fades as Aretha slumps over the lifeless body of her son. SUDDENLY, she grabs Ray and shakes him.

ARETHA
Why didn't you do somethin'?! Why didn't you come an' get me?!

Ray can't answer her...he's in shock, staring into the rippling blue rinse water. As Aretha slowly carries George's limp body into the house, WE HEAR:

A DEEP WAIL OF GOSPEL VOICES SINGING AN OLD SONG OF ZION.

7 EXT. NEW SHILOH BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY 7

A tiny church in need of paint with a hitching rail for wagons and mules out front.

8 INT. NEW SHILOH BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY 8

George's casket sits at the altar. All of Jellyroll sing out their anguish, trying to exorcise Aretha's pain. Mr. Pitt stands with Ray who doesn't sing...he's glassy eyed, in shock. Aretha breaks down, draping herself over George's casket...Mary Jane consoles her.

9 FFX SHOT: CLOSE-UP OF RAY'S EYES - THEY START TO OOZE WITH A THICK MUCUS - UNTIL THEY ARE TOTALLY ENCRUSTED.

FADE TO BLACK:

SUPER: SIX MONTHS LATER

LIGHT INTERRUPTS THE DARKNESS - WEAK, DISTANT.

DR. MCLEOD (V.O.)
Look towards the light, Ray...same as last week? You been using that salve?

YOUNG RAY (V.O.)
Yessir.

DR. MCLEOD (V.O.)
Can you see anything?

YOUNG RAY (V.O.)
Only the light, sir.

10 INT. GREENVILLE, FLORIDA \ DR. MCLEOD'S OFFICE - DAY 10

DR. MCLEOD, an elderly white man stands in front of the window, shakes his head at Aretha and Mary Jane.

DR. MCLEOD
Sorry, Aretha, I've tried everything.

MARY JANE
(breaking down)
Lord Jesus, 'Retha, it's Job's plagues!

ARETHA
Hush-up that kinda talk.
(taking Ray's hand)
...let's go home...thank you, Dr. McLeod.

A determined Aretha leads Ray from the room.

CUT TO:

11 INT. ROBINSON HOME - NIGHT 11

Ray and Aretha sit in front of the fireplace.

ARETHA
Ray, I'm not gonna beat 'round the bush, you're goin' blind.

YOUNG RAY
(terrified, voice breaking)
Yessum, I know.

ARETHA
Mary Jane thinks some curse done moved into this house...first George an' now this, but that's crazy. We're gonna have t'deal with this ourselves.

YOUNG RAY
Yessum.

ARETHA
Ray, ain't nobody gonna have pity on you, jes' 'cause you're blind. An' you can't afford to have no pity on yourself - self-pity'll eat you alive...I'll show you how to do somethin' once...an' I'll help you if you mess up twice, but the third time, you're on your own. 'Cause that's the way the world's gonna treat ya, understand?
(off Ray's nod)
...you're goin' blind, but you ain't stupid. You gotta learn how to do things an' you gotta use good common sense.

YOUNG RAY
Yessum.

ARETHA
(standing Ray up)
I'll keep everythin' in the same place in every room so you can remember. Alright, then. Let's get goin'...

SERIES OF SHOTS:

12 INT. ROBINSON HOME - NIGHT 12

Aretha leads Ray around the house.

ARETHA
This here's where you eat, an' the front doors on your left, the rocking chair an' fireplace's on your right.

Aretha leads Ray into the kitchen area.

ARETHA
The stove you can find 'cause of the heat, an' that'll lead you to the back door...the water bucket is straight ahead, next to the wash pan, okay?

YOUNG RAY
Yessum.

ARETHA
I'll show you again, then you show me.

CUT TO:

RAY'S LITTLE HANDS AT PIANO ATTEMPTING TO PLAY BOOGIE-WOOGIE.

13 INT. THE RED WING CAFE - DAY 13

MR. PIT
Did that sound right?

Mr. Pit sits next to Ray, who shakes his head 'no'.

MR. PIT
That's right, it didn't...always listen, the music'll tell you when it's right...let it come, don't fight it.

Ray nods and starts to play again - it's right this time.

MR. PIT
(clapping his hands)
That's right, baby, let it come.

14 INT. ROBINSON HOME - NIGHT 14

Ray trips over a chair, falling and skinning his knee.

YOUNG RAY
Mama!

Aretha is right there to help. She replaces the chair.

ARETHA
Ya gotta remember, Ray...ain't nothin' free in this cold world 'cept Jesus.

15 EXT. MARY JANE'S BACK PORCH - NIGHT 15

Ray and Mary Jane sit next to the radio shelling peas. They both sing along with the country tunes of the Grand Old Opry.

16 INT. ROBINSON HOME - NIGHT 16

Ray COLLIDES with the SAME CHAIR as before. He goes down hard, crying. Aretha comes to door but DOES NOT go to his aid.

YOUNG RAY
(sensing Aretha)
Mama?

Tears well up in Aretha's eyes, but she remains unmoving.

CLOSE-UP: A LOOK OF REALIZATION COMES TO RAY'S FACE - HE SLOWLY PULLS HIMSELF UP AND WIPES AWAY THE TEARS.

CUT TO:

BARE FEET RUNNING, FULL SPEED, DOWN RED DIRT ROADS

SUPER: ONE YEAR LATER

17 EXT. JELLYROLL RED DIRT ROADS - DAY 17

Ray has learned well. He stops at a fork in the road, HEARS Fannie and other wash women talking, then turns right and runs off towards The Red Wing, oblivious to the dips and turns in the road.

18 EXT. THE RED WING CAFE - DAY 18

Mr. Pit sits in front as Ray runs up with tears in his eyes.

MR. PIT
Boy, what's wrong with you?

YOUNG RAY
Mama's gonna send me away to school! Please, talk to her.

Mr. Pit sits Ray down.

MR. PIT
Your mama's already talked to me, an' I agree with her.

YOUNG RAY
Whatda 'bout my music?!

MR. PIT
Boy, there's all type of music out there for you to learn. Go learn it...the music'll never steer you wrong.

CUT TO:

19 EXT. GREENVILLE, FLORIDA - DAY 19

Dressed in their Sunday best Aretha, Mary Jane and Ray (still barefoot) walk through this all White, Jim Crow town.

ARETHA
Ray, you've gotta play real good now.

YOUNG RAY
(whining)
I don't wanna play for no white folks.

ARETHA
Enough of that! Mr. Reams's gonna write a letter so you can go to the State school.

YOUNG RAY
Please mama, I'll keep up with the normal kids, don't make me go to no blind school. I've been tryin' to be good like George.

The statement tugs at Aretha's heartstrings.

ARETHA
This ain't got nothin' to do with George.

MARY JANE
Monkey Doodle can come an' live with me.

ARETHA
Over my dead body...this boy's gotta learn to fend for 'imself. With you spoilin' 'im, he'd be a complete cripple!

MARY JANE
That ain't true an' you know it! I love that boy as much as you do. Since Jabbo died he's all I got.

ARETHA
Yes, I know you love 'im, but I'm his mama, and I'll decide. There ain't no school 'round here for a blind boy - so Ray's gotta go away...I done taught 'im as much as I can...now, you can introduce me to this here woman or I can walk up an' knock on the door.

CUT TO:

20 RAY'S FINGERS ON KEYS - PLAYING AN UPBEAT *'AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL'*

21 INT. REAMS HOME \ PARLOR \ GREENVILLE, FLORIDA - DAY 21

RUTH and A.D. REAMS, white, 40's, applaud politely as Ray finishes.

RUTH
That was lovely, he is talented.

A.D.
He sure is. I'd be glad to write a letter of recommendation for him.

Aretha smiles triumphantly. Ray's fate was sealed.

CUT TO:

22 EXT. ST. AUGUSTINE SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND - DAY 22

A yellow bus pulls through the gate of this large institution.

23 INT. ST. AUGUSTINE SCHOOL \ HALLWAY - DAY 23

MR. KNOWLES, black, 20's, carries Ray's cardboard suitcase. Ray's oversized shoes (meant to last him a couple of years) SLAP against the floor, as he works to keep pace with Mr. Knowles' long strides:

MR. KNOWLES
The morning bell is at 5:30 at which time you will bathe and get dressed. Breakfast is at 6:40, followed by Chapel. After chapel, you report to class.

YOUNG RAY
Yessir, Mr. Knowles.

24 INT. COLORED BOY'S DORM - NIGHT 24

From bunk beds along the walls BLACK BLIND and DEAF boys shout out greetings, talking about their summer experiences.

Mr. Knowles kneels and puts Ray's clothes in a footlocker. Then turns to Ray's bunk mates JOE and CLARENCE, 8, BLIND.

MR. KNOWLES
Joe, Clarence, I expect you to help Ray learn how we do things at St. Augustine.

JOE
Yessir, Mr. Knowles.

MR. KNOWLES
(sitting Ray down)
Ray, this is your bunk.

YOUNG RAY
Yessir.

MR. KNOWLES
(shouts to other boys)
Alright, sleep time! 5:30AM comes mighty early. Good night gentlemen.

The boys jump into their bunks. Ray tries to get his clothes off, but finally slips into bed with his cloths still on. Ray listens to the strange whisperings of the other boys. Terrified, his first night ever away from Aretha, he begins to sob.

BOY #1
Listen to the little sissy.

BOY #2
Yeah, baby's cryin' for his mama.

CLARENCE
Shhh, don't cry, Ray. It'll keep 'em on ya all night.

Ray places his pillow over his face to stifle his whimpering.

CUT TO:

25 INT. MISS RYAN'S CLASSROOM - DAY 25

We SEE the BRAILLE ALPHABET as MISS RYAN, black, 20's, places Ray's fingers on the Brailie lettering. Ray's attentive, excited.

MISS RYAN
This is the letter A. And this is the letter B. Do you feel the difference?

YOUNG RAY
Yessum.

26 EXT. ST. AUGUSTINE SCHOOL \ PLAYGROUND - DAY 26

Ray, Joe and Clarence stop at a chain link fence. Through the fence we SEE BLIND WHITE KIDS playing on better playground equipment.

JOE
Over there's North campus where the white kids stay. We can't go over there.

YOUNG RAY
How'd they know who's white an' who's colored? We's all blind.

Joe and Clarence laugh and give Ray a playful shove.

DISSOLVE TO:

FLASHBACK:

27 *EXT. GREENVILLE, FLORIDA - DAY* 27

Aretha, Ray and Mary Jane walk back from the Reams' house.

MARY JANE
Monkey Doodle, you keep listenin' to the Grand Ole Opry every Saturday night, and you'll know I'm thinkin' of you.

CUT TO:

28 INT. COLORED BOY'S DORM - NIGHT 28

At a radio Ray, Joe and Clarence listen to the Grand Ole Opry.

JOE
(frowning)
Why you like this hillbilly stuff?

YOUNG RAY
'Cause, it's good music.

CUT TO:

29 INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY 29

Ray plays boogie-woogie for Joe and Clarence. MISS MALLARD enters, 20's, black and tough as nails and WHACKS his knuckles with a ruler.

YOUNG RAY
Ouch, who hit me?

MISS MALLARD
I did! I'm Gladys Mallard, your teacher. There is no place in my classroom for that gut bucket slop that pretends to be music.

YOUNG RAY
Don't hit me! I'm blind, I ain't stupid!

MISS MALLARD
Let us understand one another. You are here to learn music...a clean slate that I will write the classics on. I've got mine, and you are here to get yours. Now Mr Robinson, play your scales.

YOUNG RAY
I don't know no scales.

MISS MALLARD
Then you are going to learn them.

YOUNG RAY
I don't need no scales to play music!

MISS MALLARD
As long as you are in this class, you will learn to play your scales.

YOUNG RAY
Then I ain't stayin' in yo' class!

MISS MALLARD
There's the door.

Ray gets up and walks out.

CUT TO:

30 INT. INDUSTRIAL ARTS ROOM - DAY 30

Ray, Joe and Clarence are wrapping freshly made brooms with wire. Ray, a quick study, finishes his and is on to the next.

SHOP TEACHER
You're fast at this, Robinson.

YOUNG RAY
Yessir, what else we gonna learn?

SHOP TEACHER
Wicker's next.

YOUNG RAY
Great, what then?

SHOP TEACHER
Young man, a colored boy properly trained in weaving can make a good living.

YOUNG RAY
Ain't there nothin' else?

The teacher's silence is his answer. Ray suddenly understands.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: RAY'S HANDS ATTEMPT TO PLAY A TWO HANDED SCALE.

31 INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY 31

Ray plays badly. Miss Mallard scowls.

MISS MALLARD
No, no, try it again, like this.

Miss Mallard plays the scale. Ray listens intently, then he plays it exactly like her. Miss Mallard nods approvingly.

MATCH CUT TO:

OLDER HANDS EXECUTING A BRILLIANT PASSAGE FROM *CHOPIN'S 'POLONAISE'* EXPLODING INTO ITS BOMBASTIC CONCLUSION.

32 INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY 32

The Parents and Students applaud. We SEE RAY, who is 17 (FULLY GROWN - JAIME FOX), on stage. Miss Mallard steps forward.

MISS MALLARD
My prize pupil, Mr. Ray Charles Robinson...I hate to see him go.

Ray does a wild boogie-woogie rift.

MISS MALLARD
(shaking her head)
Where's my ruler? After all I've taught you, you're still playing that slop!

RAY
Ma'am, I can't help it, I love 'em both.

They all laugh. A somber Mr. Knowles enters the room.

MR. KNOWLES
Ray, I have some terrible news, your mother is very sick.

Ray tilts his ear towards Mr. Knowles.

RAY
Which one?

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP: EMPTY WASH TUB

RAY (V.O.)
When I was home Christmas she was usin' a cane, but she said she twisted her ankle.

33 EXT. ROBINSON'S HOME - DAY 33

Mary Jane and Mr. Pit lead Ray onto the porch.

RAY
Mother, why didn't you tell me?

MARY JANE
She didn't want you to know, Ray.

MR. PIT
You know how strong willed your mother is.

Mary Jane SEES Ray' eyes welling up. She takes his arm.

MARY JANE
Stop that snivelin'...'Retha's my best friend. She always said I was spoilin' you but not this time...now you go in there an' act like the man she's raised you to be, understand.

Ray nods as Mary Jane tenderly wipes away his tears.

34 INT. ROBINSON'S HOME - DAY 34

Ray pulls back the hanging blanket. Ray sticks his head in.

RAY
Mama, you sleep?

Holding her Bible, a weakened Aretha turns over.

ARETHA
No, I'm awake...c'mere an' sit beside me.

RAY
(sitting)
Has Dr. McLeod been here?

ARETHA
I ain't messin' with that man an' his dollar a bottle sugar water.
(smiling)
...tell me 'bout you, how you doin'?

RAY
I'm alright mama.

Aretha starts to cough...a horrible, hacking cough.

RAY
I'm callin' the doctor.

ARETHA
(stern)
No, you're not...I need to talk to you.
(takes Ray's hand)
You're full grown, almost a man...have you had any girlfriends?

RAY
(blushing)
Mama, I don't wanna talk 'bout that.

ARETHA
Well, you ain't got no daddy to tell you these things, so it's up to me.

RAY
(embarrassed)
Mama, you don't have to.

ARETHA
Hush...I know you know where babies come from...but I want you to know that if you bring a baby into this world, you gotta be responsible...I don't want you to ever get no girl in trouble an' leave her, promise me you'll never do that.

RAY
I promise, Mama.

ARETHA
Jes' make sure you do...you know what it's like to be raised without a father.

RAY
Yessum.

Aretha pulls Ray to her and kisses him.

ARETHA
(soft whisper)
I'll always love you, Ray.

RAY
Yessum, I know.

35 OMITTED 35

36 OMITTED 36

37 OMITTED 37

38 OMITTED 38

CUT TO:

THE DEEP WAIL OF GOSPEL VOICES SINGING AN OLD SONG OF ZION.

39 EXT. NEW SHILOH BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY 39

The hitching rail is full of wagons and mules, but this time there's also a few cars and trucks. The church is overflowing.

40 INT. NEW SHILOH BAPTIST CHURCH - DAY 40

The citizens of Jellyroll sing the same gospel hymn honoring this strong, independent woman. Mary Jane leads Ray to Aretha's casket.

MARY JANE
She's right here, say good-bye to your mama...she's with the Lord.

Ray reaches out and gently strokes Aretha's face. THE WAIL OF THE MOURNERS WASH OVER RAY - HE WEEPS HOLDING ONTO MARY JANE. THE CONGREGATION LIFTS THEIR VOICES TOWARD HEAVEN, ESCORTING ARETHA TO THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

CUT TO SILENCE:

41 CLOSE-UP - INT. INSERT: OPEN SUITCASE - WE SEE CLOTHES CAREFULLY PLACED IN SUITCASE - THEN ARETHA'S FRAYED WHITE BIBLE. 41

42 EXT. ROBINSON'S HOME - DAY 42

Ray walks onto the front porch with suitcase in hand. Mr. Pit and Mary Jane wait out front in an old car.

CLOSE-UP: RAY'S FACE - FOR THE FIRST TIME WE HEAR WHAT RAY HEARS (EVERY SOUND IS INTENSIFIED): A BEE BUZZING, A FROG CROAKING, A DOG BARKS. IN THE DISTANCE THE SAWMILL BUZZING IS ALMOST DEAFENING.

FADE TO BLACK:

THESE SOUNDS SLOWLY SEGUE TO THE SOUNDS OF THE CITY. HONKING CAR HORNS, PEOPLE CHATTERING, AS A CAR DOOR SLAMS, WE HEAR...

LENA MAE (V.O.)
I'M LENA MAE, MARY JANE'S FRIEND.

FADE UP:

43 EXT. THOMPSON HOME \ JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA - DAY 43

We SEE LENA MAE, heavyset, black, 30's, pumping Ray's hand and shouting unnaturally as FRED pulls the suitcase out of car.

LENA MAE
...THIS HERE'S MY HUSBAND, FRED.

FRED
NICE, TO MEET YA, RAY.

RAY
Yessir, it's nice meetin' y'all.

LENA MAE
MARY JANE TOLD ME HOW YOU LIKE THE GRAND OLE OPRY, SO WE PUT A RADIO IN YOUR ROOM.

RAY
Thank you, Mrs. Jackson.

LENA MAE
RAY, YOU'RE IN THE CITY NOW. NO NEED TO BE FORMAL. JUST CALL US BY OUR FIRST NAMES: LENA MAE AN' FRED.

RAY
Yessum, I'll do my best...but, could y'all do me a favor?

LENA MAE
SURE, RAY. WHAT?

RAY
Could y'all please stop yellin'. I'm blind, not deaf.

Realizing their mistake, they all laugh.

44 EXT. MUSICIAN'S LOCAL 632 - DAY 44

SUPER: JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA - 1947

45 INT. MUSICIAN'S LOCAL 632 - DAY 45

We SEE Ray at the piano showing his stuff: Erskine Hawkins, a little classical, and some down home gut bucket blues. Fred smiles and enthusiastically nudges the, white, UNION CLERK.

UNION CLERK
Very nice, but I need proof of age.

RAY
(patting pockets)
I, uh...

FRED
He's eighteen.

UNION CLERK
I need still some I.D..

A SLICK MUSICIAN, black, 40's, emerges from the corner.

SLICK MUSICIAN
Give the kid a break...he looks nineteen.

UNION CLERK
(weakening)
Union dues are ten dollars.

RAY
I ain't got ten dollars.

SLICK MUSICIAN
Hey, I jes' might be able to help. I'm booked for three days down at The Knothole an' I need a piano player. I pay $3.00 a night for three sets. An' to seal the deal, I'll throw in an extra buck, so you can get your card...

UNION CLERK
Okay by me.

RAY
Wow Mister, thanks.

SLICK MUSICIAN
(Cheshire Cat smile)
My friends call me House Cat.

CUT TO:

46 INT. SMOKY JUKE JOINT - NIGHT (T.H. STILL MUST CHOOSE SONG) 46

House Cat sings and plays gut bucket blues on guitar, backed by bass, drums and Ray on piano. The joints full of drunks - a bottle SMASHES on the wall behind Ray. He's terrified but keeps playing.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: TWO ONE DOLLAR BILLS BEING LAID ON COUNTER

47 INT. MUSICIAN'S LOCAL 632 - DAY 47

The Union Clerk looks up at Ray, confused.

UNION CLERK
That's not enough, son.

RAY
Not enough?! You said ten dollars.

UNION CLERK
You gave me two ones.

RAY
WHAT?!!! He said it was two fives!

UNION CLERK
Son, you've been stiffed...an' that ole Alley Cat already skipped town.

Realizing he has been taken, Ray turns away, totally deflated.

UNION CLERK
(picking up phone)
Hold on...I may be crazy, but...

CUT TO:

48 INT. BILLY RAY'S COUNTRY & WESTERN BAR - NIGHT 48

A rowdy bunch of Hillbillies drinking and shouting for the band.

BILLY RAY (V.O.)
Damn it, Til, I said no nigras!

BACKSTAGE - BILLY RAY, white, 50's, in an argument with TIL, white, 40's, the leader of the FLORIDA PLAYBOYS.

TIL
Billy Ray, you've got a mess of folks out front hollerin' to hear the Florida playboys. We need a piano player an' this boy's real good...what's it gonna be?
(Billy Ray steams)
Ray, c'mon over an' meet your new boss.

Ray walks over in cowboy garb, and extends his hand.

RAY
Nice to meet you, sir.

BILLY RAY
(turning away in disgust)
I'm warnin' ya. One hint of trouble, you an' your blind nigra are outta here! An' put some goddamn sunglasses over 'em eyes. Or he'll scare 'em to death.

Billy Ray heads out front as the band takes the stage.

RAY
(intimidated)
Is everything alright, Mr. Til?

TIL
(putting sunglasses on Ray)
Yeah, small town, small minds...can you sing harmony, Ray?

RAY
I can sing anythin' you want.

TIL
Oh yeah? Can you Yodel?

RAY
Say what?

Til lets out a wild Yodel that ignites the audience. Ray scrambles behind the piano as the band .

CUT TO:

TEN ONE DOLLAR BILLS FLOAT DOWN ONTO THE COUNTER

RAY (V.O.)
There's ten there.

49 INT. MUSICIAN'S LOCAL 632 - DAY 49

The Union Clerk smiles and nods.

UNION CLERK
Here's your card.

GOSSIE (V.O.)
What'cha say Bill?

The Clerk looks up and SEES GOSSIE MCKEE, dapper, light skinned, 20's, musician, stroll into the Union Hall.

UNION CLERK
Gossie McKee, when'd you get back?

GOSSIE
Jes' blew in from Detroit, man, I tell ya, the joints up there are jumpin'.

UNION CLERK
Then why'd you come back here?

GOSSIE
To see my mama, an' Manzy Harris got a gig at the officer's mess at Drew field.

UNION CLERK
Forget it...that's a white venue.

GOSSIE
Man catch up, since the War, coloreds are playin' white joints...we need a pianist?

RAY
I play piano.

GOSSIE
(cocks his head, skeptical)
Oh yeah, who you played for?

RAY
The Florida Playboys.

GOSSIE
The who?!

UNION CLERK
It's a country band.

GOSSIE
(laughing)
OoWee a hillbilly! I'm lookin' for cats with chops. This gig's sophisticated, I'm talkin' Nat King Cole.

RAY
That's me.

Gossie gives Ray a hard look. The Clerk nods his approval.

WE HEAR JAZZ AS WE CUT TO:

50 INT. THOMPSON HOME - NIGHT 50

A banner reads *'HAPPY BIRTHDAY FRED'*. Ray's with Lena Mae.

RAY
I'm gonna be playin' this white club, an' makin' some big dough, five bucks a night.

LOUISE (V.O.)
'Scuse me, Big Time...

LOUISE and MARION, 18, both black and shapely, stand there.

LOUISE
Lena Mae, Mama's got the cake ready.

LENA MAE
Ray, have you met Marion an' Louise?

RAY
Can't say that I have.

LENA MAE
This is Marion.

Ray shakes Marion's hand and <u>FEELS HER WRIST AT THE SAME TIME</u>.

LOUISE
An' I'm Louise.

RAY
(feels wrist; smiles)
Nice meetin' ya, Louise.

LENA MAE
(walking away)
Lemme go see 'bout that cake.

RAY
Would y'all like some punch?

MARION
No thanks, I don't wanna trouble you.
(rolling her eyes at Louise)
We've gotta go.

LOUISE
(being pulled away)
Sorry, sugar.

Fred turns off record player, steps to the middle of the room.

FRED
Hold on, y'all! Hold on!

Everyone stops dancing and talking.

FRED
It's my birthday, right?! I wanna listen to live music not records. OK, Ray?

Louise looks surprised as Ray does a flourish on the piano.

RAY
Whatcha wanna hear, Uncle? How 'bout a little Charles Brown.

Ray plays and sings *Charles Brown's "Driftin' Blues"*. Fred grabs * Lena Mae and starts to dance. After a few bars...

RAY
Nat King Cole, are you in the house?

Ray plays *Nat King Cole's 'Get Your Kicks On Route 66'*. *

RAY
(turning up charm)
Louis Jordan, now, I know you're 'round here someplace.

Ray plays *Louis Jordan's 'Caldonia'*. A disbelieving Louise moves * over to Ray. As Ray finishes.

LOUISE
Do Nat King Cole again for me.

RAY
Louise, right? *

Louise is surprised that Ray knew who she was.

RAY
Sit yourself down here an' help out?

Ray slides over just the exact amount of space needed for Louise to sit next to him with her leg touching his. *

RAY
Well, sugar, what ya wanna hear?

LOUISE
'Sweet Loraine'. *

RAY
My favorite. *

Ray starts to sing *'Sweet Loraine'*. Fred and Lena Mae dance close* Ray sings in Louise's ear. *

MUSICAL SEGUE \ PICTURE CUT TO: *

<u>STARCHED WHITE NAVAL UNIFORMS - WHITE COUPLES DANCING</u>.

51 INT. SKYHAVEN CLUB - NIGHT 51

Ray continues to sing *'Sweet Loraine'* as front man for the MANZY * HARRIS QUARTET. He is accompanied by GOSSIE MCKEE on guitar, OTTO* MCQUEEN on bass and MANZY HARRIS on drums. *

52 EXT. LOUISE'S MOTHER'S PORCH - NIGHT / MUSIC CONTINUES 52 *

We SEE Ray and Louise as they kiss on Louise's front porch. SUDDENLY, a light comes on! LOUISE'S MOTHER at the door.

LOUISE'S MOTHER
Louise, get your fast ass in here!
(to Ray)
An' you, don't set foot on my porch again!

Louise's Mother grabs Louise and takes her into the house.

CUT TO:

53 INT. SKYHAVEN CLUB \ EMPTY STAGE - DAY 53

Bright shafts of sunlight shine into the empty SkyHaven Club as Ray plays and dictates ~~arrangements~~ to Gossie.

RAY
The bass line should go like this.

Ray plays the line as Gossie writes it down.

RAY
Charles Brown plays this in B-flat, but I'm changin' it to E.

Ray starts to play "*You Won't Let Me Go*"

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO:

54 EXT. THOMPSON HOME - DAY 54

Louise pulls Ray up the stairs. He's tentative nervous...

LOUISE
Come on, my Mama put Fred and Lena Mae on the train to Tallahassee this mornin'.

RAY
Yeah, but if they come back.

LOUISE
You crazy? She and her sister'll yak for three days straight...gimme that key...

She unlocks the front door and gooses Ray as he enters.

CUT TO:

55 INT. BILLY RAY'S COUNTRY & WESTERN BAR - NIGHT 55

Ray is on stage with the Florida Playboys playing a swinging Spade Cooley Number. He makes an attempt to Yodel, but fails miserably.

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO:

55A INT. KITCHEN - DAY: CLOSE UP: WATER TAP FILLING GLASS - PANNING UP WE SEE RAY, BODY GLISTENING WITH PERSPIRATION - GULPING IT DOWN. 55A

LOUISE (V.O.)
Ray, you comin' back to bed?

RAY
Yeah, I'm gettin' some water.

LOUISE (V.O.)
Good, 'cause, I ain't finished.

In disbelief, Ray pours the remaining water over his head.

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO:

55B INT. BATHROOM - DAY: DRIVING RAIN BEATS AGAINST THE BATHROOM WINDOW. 55B

LOUISE (V.O.)
Ray, when you comin' out?

CAMERA PANS OVER TO SEE Ray sitting on the john.

RAY
In a minute!

LOUISE (V.O.)
Hurry up, mama's gonna give you some more.

Ray sighs and flushes the toilet.

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO:

55C INT. BEDROOM - DAY: CLOSE UP - RAY IS DEVOURING A PIECE OF CHICKEN. 55C
SUDDENLY, LOUISE SITS UP AND PULLS HIM BACK DOWN OUT OF FRAME.

SEGUE / CUT TO:

56 INT. BILLY RAY'S COUNTRY & WESTERN BAR - NIGHT 56

Ray doing a perfect Yodel on stage with the Florida Playboys. The hillbilly audience stands, giving Ray a STANDING OVATION.

MATCH CUT:

57 INT. SKYHAVEN CLUB - NIGHT 57

The sophisticated white audience, giving Ray a STANDING OVATION.

DISSOLVE TO:

58 EXT. SKYHAVEN CLUB \ EMPTY - NIGHT 58

Ray and Gossie are packing up instruments.

RAY
Did you hear that guy talkin' 'bout the shellin' they took at Red Beach?

GOSSIE
Man, just be glad we missed that party.

RAY
Hey Gossie, ain't it great Commander Simms's extended us for 6 months - Manzy's ordered a Cadillac...I might get one too.

GOSSIE
Man, don't be stupid! He'll get a Cadillac but you won't...he's the leader, he gets paid more. Forget this small time gig...there's clubs up North, where they drink champagne an' pay a man, so he don't have to make payments on no car, hell, he can throw down the cash.

RAY
I don't know...I got two jobs, an' things are goin' pretty good with Louise.

GOSSIE
Louise?! Man, you know how many honeys there are out there on the road?

RAY
(walking away)
Forget it, Gossie. I've got it made here.

GOSSIE
This is nowhere...I've been out there, Ray...I've seen cats that can really blow.

RAY
Hey baby, I ain't no slouch!

GOSSIE
No disrespect man, but these cats will cut you to shreds...you wanna play in the big time, you gotta be 10 times better than you are now, an' you'll never get there hangin' 'round this guppy pond...you think on it...'cause, I'm gonna be vapors soon.

CUT TO:

59 INT. THOMPSON HOME \ RAY'S ROOM - DAY 59

Ray and Louise are laying in bed.

LOUISE
Gossie full of it, he don't know nothin'.

RAY
I told 'im no, Louise.

LOUISE
'Sides, you're blind, Ray, you can't be goin' on no road.

Ray reacts in indignation, turning away from her. Louise reacts.

LOUISE
I didn't mean nothin' by it.
(kissing Ray's neck)
I jes' didn't wanna see ya get your hopes too high...'Sides, I've got some good news for you. Even my mama likes the idea.

Ray turns back over.

LOUISE
My uncle said he can get you on at the tire retread shop.

RAY
(sitting up, angrily)
What're you talkin' 'bout? I'm a musician! I ain't no tire retreader! That's worse than wicker work!

LOUISE
But this is good steady work...not that 'on again, off again' musician's life, feast or famine, is what my mama calls it.

Ray is stunned. His wheels are turning.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: MAP OF THE UNITED STATES

GOSSIE (V.O.)
I'm gonna stretch this string as far away from here as we can go?

60 INT. SKYHAVEN CLUB (1949) - DAY 60

Ray waits as Gossie stretches a string across the map.

GOSSIE
Seattle, Washington. I'll leave tomorrow to get things set up.

RAY
(suspicious)
Don't you got a girlfriend in Seattle?

GOSSIE
Just one of many. She waits tables at The Rocking Chair, the sweetest little jazz joint on the West Coast. I'm also tight with the manager...she'll give us a gig.

61 OMITTED 61

CUT TO:

MONTAGE OF HISTORIC GREYHOUND BUS FOOTAGE: AS WE SEE RAY'S CROSS COUNTRY TREK WE HEAR THE 'WHITE' POP HITS OF 1949 AMERICA.

62 EXT. Ray's bus rolling through the segregated south (TOMMY DORSEY)

63 INT. BUS - Ray sits behind "Whites only" sign. RUDY VALLEE). 63

64 EXT. Greyhound Bus rolls through Chicago (Stock Shot) (GLEN MILLER).

64-A INT. Greyhound Bus - Driver removes "Whites Only" sign. 64-A

65 EXT. SNOWY PLAINS: BING CROSBY croons as Ray sleeps. 65

BUS DRIVER (V.O.)
Seattle! Seattle, Washington!

66 OMITTED 66

67 OMITTED 67

CUT TO:

68 EXT. THE ROCKING CHAIR CLUB \ WET STREETS (1949) - NIGHT 68

Ray exists a cab into a group of young hipster musicians (15, 16) in front of club. The youngest, QUINCY JONES, "Q", blows an intricate jazz riff on his trumpet as Ray hits the sidewalk.

QUINCY
Hey Slick, I'm a dime shy of gettin' in.

RAY
Man, how many people you pulled that on?

QUINCY
(laughing; caught)
Hey man, I'm just hustlin'.

RAY
How much it cost to get in here?

QUINCY
Nothin' if you got talent...but you got to be 21 - which you ain't. We usually wait 'round 'til it gets packed an' then sneak in through the bathroom window...you give me that dime an' you can join us.

RAY
I ain't crawlin' through no window. I'm walkin' through the front door.

QUINCY
Two bits says you don't make it.

RAY
You're on. What's you name?

QUINCY
Quincy Jones.

RAY
Quincy? What kinda name is that?

QUINCY
American President...John Quincy Adams.

Quincy guides Ray to the front door and a LARGE BOUNCER.

BOUNCER
Whoa, partner, I need some I.D..

RAY
I'm here to see Gossie McKee, he dates Cheryl Koester...she's a waitress here.

BOUNCER
Ain't never heard of 'im...an' you ain't gettin' in unless I see some paper.

Ray's embarrassed. 'Q' smirks, this blind kid's not so cool after all. Then Ray raises his sunglasses revealing his scarred eyes.

RAY
Uncle Sam didn't need no paper when I left my eyes on Red Beach.

BOUNCER
You're jivin', you were at Normandy?

RAY
I was a Navy coxswain shuttlin' troops onto Red Beach - we took a direct hit.

BOUNCER
(moves aside)
Go on inside, man.
(pointing to Quincy)
...but not you!

RAY
(laughing over shoulder)
Q, I'll collect my money later.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: OBERON A DWARF

OBERON
Welcome all you coool cats an' fine felines...you've come to the place where the sophistiCats an' the hipsters hang their Be-Bop hats.

69 INT. THE ROCKING CHAIR CLUB - AFTER MIDNIGHT 69

Waitresses move swiftly serving an integrated clientele.

OBERON
...snuggle up an' come near, for this is Talent Night at The Rocking Cheer.
(tossing sand onto stage)
...let's hear it for Dancin' Al.

An old time hoofer steps onto the stage doing a WILD TAP.

AT THE BAR: Ray is hungrily eating a bowl of chili and beans, while MARLENE, the BAR'S MANAGER, black, plump, 40's, sizes him up.

MARLENE
Gossie didn't say his 'fantastic' piano player was an' underage blind 'Bama boy.

Ray ignores her comment as Oberon walks up.

OBERON
(confidential to Marlene)
Thurmond and the Demurs just called, they can't make it, Thurmond's sick.

MARLENE
What 'bout Sassy?

OBERON
She's got a flat tire, gonna be late.

MARLENE
(turning back to Ray)
Okay 'Bama, why don't you get on up there an' show me what you got?

RAY
(insulted)
I ain't from 'Bama an' I ain't no amateur!

MARLENE
Well Puddin', this is the only audition you're gonna get...either you get up there now or you an' Gossie can forget it.

RAY
(suddenly very nervous)
Well, I...uh...

OBERON
Here, smoke some of this.

Oberon gives Ray a joint. Ray takes a pull.

RAY
This ain't tobacco?

OBERON
Jes' hold it in. It'll calm you down.

Ray takes another long pull on the joint and holds it in.

CUT TO:

SPOTLIGHT HITTING OBERON AT THE MIKE.

OBERON
Now, I got somethin' special for you purrin' dolls, an' I don't mean Oberon's big thunder - that's for another show.
(loud hoots from the women)
...we got someone new, straight off a Florida bus, I give you Mr. Ray *"Don't Call me Sugar"* Robinson!

There is light applause, as Marlene helps Ray onto the stage.

RAY
(sitting at piano)
Okay folks, whatcha wanna hear?

The audience DOES NOT respond - a tough crowd.

RAY
How 'bout a little Charles Brown?

As Ray starts to sing *'Driftin' Blues'* the audience responds.

RAY
Let's see if Nat King Cole's at home.

Ray goes into a Nat Cole's *'Route 66"*. They start to applaud.

OBERON
Hey, the 'Bama ain't bad.

MARLENE
I'd say, he saved our asses.

RAY
Louis Jordan's 'round here someplace...
"Caldonia? Caldonia...what makes your big head so hard????"

What had won Louise, now has Seattle eating out of Ray's hand. Back by the bathroom door, Quincy and his boys whistle their approval.

CUT TO:

70 INT: A HOTEL DOOR JERKS OPEN BUT IS STOPPED BY THE SAFETY CHAIN - GOSSIE'S FACE APPEARS IN THE GAP. 70

GOSSIE
Who's in there?! Get outta my room!

A bare chested Ray comes into frame and unlocks safety chain.

RAY
Gossie, where you been?

GOSSIE
Cattin' around, Ray, you know me. Come on open up...I got us an audition.

RAY
(opening door)
We don't need no audition.

Gossie comes through the door - then stops cold in disbelief.

REVERSE CUT TO:

71 INT: RAY AND GOSSIE'S BREWSTER HOTEL ROOM - RAINY DAY 71

Marlene is in bed wearing a sly smile.

MARLENE
All you need is a bass player.

72 OMITTED 72

73 OMITTED 73

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: MILT'S BONEY FINGERS CARESS BASS STRINGS

OBERON (V.O.)
Guys an' dolls...what we got for you, oughta to be against the law!

74 INT. THE ROCKING CHAIR CLUB - NIGHT 74

MILT, tough, black, 30's, trades jazz fills with Gossie as Oberon purrs to a packed house. Quincy helps Ray to the piano.

RAY
This is better than comin' through a bathroom window, huh, Q?

QUINCY
(incredibly excited)
Incredible...worth payin' off that bet.

OBERON
Ladies an' gents, Tonight The Chair's got the baddest cats in town, THE MCSON TRIO!

Ray does a dead on imitation of *Nat Cole's "Straighten up & Fly"*.

MUSIC CONTINUES OVER MONTAGE:

74A CLOSE-UP: A PHOTO OF THE MCSON TRIO AS A SERIES OF STICKERS TAPE ACROSS FRAME: "Extended Thru Christmas", "Back By Popular Demand"; "4th of July Party featuring our Favorite McSons"

74B EXT. HIGHWAY BETWEEN CEDAR FOREST AND STORMY PUGET SOUND (STOCKSHOT)

74C EXT. WASHINGTON STATE HIGHWAY - DAY 74C

The band's old clunker has broken down. Ray helps Milt change a tire while a pristine Gossie paces, complaining.

GOSSIE
Why'd I let you talke me into this tour...out in the middle of nowhere!

MILT
(under breath)
Asshole.

Ray nods, tightens a bolt.

OBERON (V.O.)
Guys and Dolls, back after their triumphant tour of the Yakima Valley, savor the favor of the McSon Trio.

MUSIC ENDS AS WE CUT TO:

75 INT. HALLWAY RAY'S SEATTLE ROOMING HOUSE - DAY 75

Quincy blows a riff on his trumpet through the open door.

RAY (V.O.)
C'mon in, Q.

76 INT. RAY'S TWO ROOM APARTMENT- DAY 76

Quincy enters a totally dark room, shades pulled tight.

QUINCY
Ray?

RAY
I'm in the kitchen.

Quincy feels his way back to the kitchen, where he finds Ray, lit only by the gas flames under a frying pan.

QUINCY
(freaking out)
Jesus man, you're gonna burn yourself.

Quincy runs over and lifts up the shade - light floods the room.

RAY
Think 'bout it, Q, what good's a light gonna do me?
(holding out chicken)
...try this.

Quincy with trepidation bites into a chicken leg.

QUINCY
(amazed)
Man, this is great...I can't believe it.

RAY
Southern cookin', Q, ain't nothing like it. C'mon...an' bring your trumpet.

QUINCY
Where we goin'?

RAY
To school.

CUT TO:

76A INT. EMPTY ROCKING CHAIR CLUB (1950) - DAY 76A

Sucking on a joint, Ray jams the hottest Be-Bop jazz with NYC MUSICIANS, learning his chops. Suddenly, he stops, excited.

RAY
Wait a minute, baby that's rreeaal nice!

NYC MUSICIAN
Sumpin' I got from Diz last week in KC.

The MUSICIAN does a trumpet riff. 'Q' tries to duplicat it but fails. Ray plays the riff exactly.

NYC MUSICIAN
Cool baby, but we gotta pack it up...we're 'pose to be in Denver tomorrow night.

RAY
Nah daddy-o, you can't cut me off!

NYC MUSICIAN
We'll check you on the rebound.

RAY
Baby, make it soon, I need the schoolin'.

QUINCY
Ray, I don't get it, with these cats you jam like Bud Powell, but with Gossie you're stone cold commercial.

RAY
Q, I believe in givin' the public what they pay for...if people lay down their bread they're entitled to a return on their dollar.
(smiles&plays a jazzy flourish)
...but I always put in some bacon fat.

77 OMITTED 77

78 OMITTED 78

79 OMITTED 79

80 OMITTED 80

81 OMITTED 81

CUT TO:

82 INT. THE ROCKING CHAIR CLUB (1950) - RAINY NIGHT 82

As the McSon Trio finishes their set, Oberon runs on stage.

OBERON
That was the homegrown...an' I ain't talkin' 'bout gage. Course, if you smoked tonight, you already lustin' for Thursday and some a'that Thanksgiving Bird, right?

This brings a laugh from the crowd.

83 INT. THE ROCKING CHAIR CLUB \ DRESSING ROOM (1950) - NIGHT 83

As the band enters the dressing room Milt lights a joint. He passes it to Ray. Gossie is irritated as Ray takes a hit.

GOSSIE
Man, don't light up that stank in here!

RAY
Why don't you shut up for a change.

Gossie flares, but Ray stands his ground. A KNOCK silences this confrontation...Marlene enters with JACK LAUDERDALE, black, 40's.

MARLENE
Gentlemen, I'd like you to meet my friend Jack Lauderdale...Jack, the McSon Trio...

JACK
How you cats doin'?

RAY
We be takin' it easy Greasy...

MILT
'Cause we've got a long way to slide.'

Milt slides his palm across Ray's palm. They crack up.

JACK
I thought you guys were great. I own SwingTime Records, I'd like to record you.

They're all a little shocked. Then Gossie pipes up.

GOSSIE
Listen mister, we ain't got no money to invest in makin' no record.

JACK
You don't need money...I'm paying for studio time and AF of M scale.

RAY
Sounds good.

JACK
But, I'm not payin' royalties to Chaz Brown and Nat Cole. You got originals?

GOSSIE
No, we ain't got...

RAY
(suddenly interrupting)
We'll have two original songs ready.

Gossie touches Ray on the arm. Ray flips his hand away.

RAY
When do you want to record?

JACK
Gotta be back in L.A. for Turkey day, so, why don't I book time tomorrow at the college radio station, say around two?

RAY
(looking sick)
Solid.

MARLENE
(smiling proudly)
I feel like a new mama, my babies are gonna make a record...champagne's on me.

Jack and Marlene leave. Gossie spins on Ray.

GOSSIE
Where we gonna get two originals?

RAY
I'll take care of it.

GOSSIE
That man's puttin' up real money for a session an' I ain't gonna get stuck payin' for it if we don't deliver.

RAY
(final)
I said, I'll take care of it.

CUT TO:

84 OMITTED 84

85 INT. THE ROCKING CHAIR CLUB - NIGHT 85

Chairs on tables. On an empty stage, Ray works out the bluesy music and lyrics to Confession Blues.

RAY
'I want to tell you a story about a boy...who was once in love'

MUSICAL SEGUE AND CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: AN AMPEX RECORDER CAPTURING RAY'S VOICE.

RAY (V.O.)
'...she took abvantage of my goodness an' made a pitiful fool outta me...'

86 INT. COLLEGE RADIO STATION \ CONTROL BOOTH - DAY 86

Jack sits with the engineer. Clicks on the talk-back.

JACK
Okay, let's do it again, a little faster.

When he turns back the engineer is taking down the tape.

JACK (CONT'D)
What the hell are you doin'?

ENGINEER
Time's up.

JACK
But I only got one take on each song.

ENGINEER
I got the news, three commercials, and then the WU Football game. Sessions over.

The Engineer cues the DJ, who shouts out the headlines.

In RECORDING BOOTH, the guys wait uneasily as Jack enters.

JACK
(forced smile)
That's was great. I got what I need.

RAY
(unconvinced)
You sure?

JACK
Yeah, I'll get the record pressed in L.A. and immediately out to DJ's.

GOSSIE
What 'bout our contract an' money?

JACK
I didn't bring any SwingTime contracts.
(Gossie nudges Ray)
...but as for your money.
(taking wad of bills)
Here you go Milt...here's yours Ray, and Gossie, as leader you get double scale

RAY
Double???

He gets up and storms out SLAMMING the door behind him. Jack follows Ray out and stops Ray in the hallway.

JACK
Ray, wait...I had to give Gossie double, because he put his name on the contract as leader...take this.
(puts cash in Ray's hand)
...this is more than Gossie got.
(Ray continues to sulk)
Look man, I know who's got the real talent ...you're wastin' your time in Seattle ...LA's where it's at.

Ray starts to warm up...shows a little interest.

JACK
We need to think about your name...Sugar Ray Robinson has the Robinson franchise all tied up. How about just Ray Charles?

RAY
You can call me anything you want as long as you put that record out.

WIPE TO:

EFX SHOT: *"CONFESSION BLUES"* SPINS INTO FRAME ON DOWNBEAT RECORDS:

87 OMITTED 87

88 OMITTED 88

89 OMITTED 89

90 OMITTED 90

91 OMITTED 91

92 OMITTED 92

93 OMITTED 93

94 OMITTED 94

95 OMITTED 95

96 *OMITTED* 96

97 OMITTED 97

98 OMITTED 98

99 OMITTED 99

JOE ADAMS (V.O.)
Hello South Central LA, this is the *"Mayor of Melody"*, Joe Joe Adams, on KOWL bringing you another Big Joe Turner.

WE HEAR JOE TURNER'S *"SHAKE RATTLE AND ROLL"* AS WE FADE UP ON:

SHINY CADILLAC HOOD ORNAMENT - THE CAMERA CRANES UP TO REVEAL JACK AND RAY RIDING IN A 1951 YELLOW CADILLAC CONVERTIBLE.

100 EXT. LOS ANGELES \ CENTRAL AVENUE (1951) - DAY 100

Jack drives Ray down the LA's prosperous and all black Central Ave

JACK
Smell that, Ray?

Ray takes a deep breath.

JACK
What you smell is success, baby...this is where the Negro can spread his wings and fly...everything is possible in L.A..

RAY
I can dig it.

CUT TO:

ART TATUM PLAYING A BRILLIANT JAZZ PIANO SOLO

101 INT. THE KENTUCKY CLUB (1951) - NIGHT 101 *

As Ray holds Jack's elbow, they follow a Maitre d' through the posh black KENTUCKY CLUB. Art Tatum on stage.

RAY
Oh man, that's Art Tatum!

JACK
Sure is, you wanna meet him?

RAY
(stammers; intimidated)
I...I couldn't, he's number one, the most! *

JACK
And so are you, Ray.

RAY
I ain't fit to empty his slop jar.

As Maitre d' seats them.

JACK *
I feel like celebrating...we'll have a *
bottle of your best champagne. *

The Maitre d' smiles and leaves.

JACK
(looking around)
Everybody's here tonight.
(waving to Scatman)
...Scatman Crothers, the actor, is over at the bar, he played Billie Holiday's lover in *'Symphony In Black'*.
(low whisper)
...behind you is Lillian Randolph, she plays Madame McQueen on Amos 'n Andy.

LOWELL
What's the haps, Jack? *

LOWELL FULSON, a flamboyant black band leader, 40's, enters. *

JACK
Hey baby, have a seat.
(as Lowell sits down)
Lowell Fulson, I'd like you to meet...

LOWELL
I know, The Blind Sensation, Ray Charles.
(taking Ray's hand)
...nice to meet you, Ray.

JACK *
See Ray, everybody's heard of you.
(yelling to Waiter)
...Waiter, bring us another glass.

RAY
Nice meetin' ya, I love your music.

LOWELL
Get used to it. Jack has the crazy idea of sendin' us out on the road together.

JACK
How's that sound, Ray? I'll pay you thirty bucks a week, as Lowell's opening act, and an extra five, for doing charts for his band?

RAY
Sounds great.
(smiling)
...long as I'm paid in singles.

The WAITER arrives with the champagne. Jack raises his glass.

JACK
To the success of the tour.

They toast and down their champagne.

CUT TO:

BAGS ARE TIED ONTO THE ROOF RACK OF A SMALL TOUR BUS. PAN DOWN TO REVEAL JEFF BROWN, HARD WORKING, BLACK, 30'S SWEATING AWAY.

102 EXT. LOS ANGELES \ CENTRAL AVENUE \ HOTEL - EARLY MORNING 102

WILBUR J. BRASSFIELD, 40's, black, Lowell'S ROAD MANAGER, walks up.

WILBUR
Did you get the oil checked?

JEFF
Yeah, an' a complete tune up.

WILBUR
(angry)
I told you not to be spendin' money unless I approved it!

JEFF
(stands; eye to eye)
I did the work myself.

Like all bullies, Wilbur's a coward and backs down. He deflects anger on the sleepy band members who are filtering out of the hotel.

WILBUR
Alright, get your asses on the bus!

Wilbur zeroes in on DAVID 'FATHEAD' NEWMAN, 20's.

WILBUR (CONT'D)
...we ain't got all day, Fathead!

FATHEAD turns his behind and pats it, but Wilber can't respond, because he has to greet Lowell, Jack and Ray exiting the hotel.

JACK
I want you to take good care of my boy.

LOWELL
Like my own brother.

JACK
Ray, you call me if you need anything.

RAY
Sure, Jack.

WILBUR
Daylight's burnin', let's go!

As Ray starts to board the bus, Jeff gives him a hand.

JEFF
There's four steps.

RAY
Thanks.

The bus door closes. Jack waves as the bus pulls out.

CUT TO: *

102A INT. EMPIRE ROOM (DALLAS, TEXAS) - DAY 102A *

Lowell performs *"ROCK THIS HOUSE"*. The band is sluggish and uninspired. Ray tries to spike up the tempo but to no avail. *

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO: *

103 EXT. POV THROUGH BUS WINDOW: OKLAHOMA HWY 152 ROAD SIGN - DAY 103 *

104 INT. LOWELL'S TOUR BUS - DAY 104 *

Ray sits behind Jeff, the driver, listening to the band members BS: *

FATHEAD *
Man, when we hit Memphis this big legged *
woman's gonna ring my bell...ooohh wee. *

WILBUR *
A big legged girl'd break your little *
boney ass in half. *

FATHEAD *
Your sister didn't. *

Everybody on the buss starts hoots and laughs. Wilbur starts to get up, but Lowell grabs his arm. *

LOWELL *
You started it...sit down. *

MUSIC ENDS AS WE CUT TO: *

105 INT. JOE'S SKYLINE NIGHTCLUB (EMPTY) - DAY 105 *

Ray is rehearsing *"ROCKING AFTER MIDNIGHT"* with the band. *

RAY
The horns start on the fourth beat with an eighth-note triplet pick up, B-flat, C, D, then the D ties over the bar to a dotted quarter, got it?

The brass section nods.

RAY
Drummer, you watch my left foot an' shoulder for the cue. OK, let's try it.

They attack their charts, noticeably tighter as we SEGUE/CUT TO:

106 EXT. JOE'S SKYLINE - NIGHT: A NEON SIGN FLASHING: JOE'S SKYLINE.

107 INT. JOE'S SKYLINE: LOWELL FULSON PERFORMS *'ROCKING AFTER MIDNIGHT'* BEFORE A PACKED HOUSE. RAY IS ON PIANO, CONTROLLING THE BAND. LOWELL ATTEMPTS A GUITAR SOLO, HE HAS TROUBLE KEEPING UP.

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO:

107A INT. JOE'S SKYLINE - LATER THAT NIGHT 107A

The band have broken down the stage and are pairing off with various women who are waiting around. Ray sits at the piano listening to the sexual banter.

FATHEAD
You girls know where we can get us a steak this time a night?

WOMAN #1
You mean big, thick and juicy?

The Band sing out an affirmative chorus.

RAY
(smiling, friendly)
Hey, where you cats goin'?

The band members look at one another - their facial expressions show they do not what to be bothered with Ray.

BAND MEMBER #1
(low whisper)
Man, he plays the piano good, but I don't wanna be baby-sitin' no blind cat.

FATHEAD
Sorry Baby, only room for six in the cab.

They run out leaving Ray devestated. After a beat he turns to the piano and starts to play a slow mournful blues that turns into Lowell Fulsom's *"EVERY DAY I HAVE THE BLUES"*.

MUSIC PLAYS OVER A SERIES OF DISSOLVES:

108 EXT. THROUGH BUS WINDSHIELD: ROAD SIGNS FLASHING PAST; TEXAS 180, MISSISSIPPI HWY 61, LOUISIANA 25, ILLINOIS 49.

JEFF (V.O.)
Ok, 15 minutes for Gas. Anybody needs a pit stop, there's a field across the road.

108A EXT/INT LOWELL'S TOUR BUS PULLS INTO GAS STATION - DAY 108A

Jeff opens bus door and a band member rushes off and runs across the street. Clearly visiable on the Gas Station is a sign that reads: "RESTROOMS - WHITE ONLY". Fathead tries to keep it light.

FATHEAD
I told that fool not to cut his dope with a laxative.

Everybody laughs. Ray's ears perk up...dope?

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO:

109 INT. REGAL (CHICAGO) EMPTY NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT 109

Exhausted band members, in street clothes, are setting up.

WILBUR
Hurry up, Showtime's in forty minutes!

MUSICAL MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

Band members, dressed in uniforms, back Lowell on stage playing "EVERYDAY" to a packed house.

MUSICAL MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

Band members breaking down stage. Wilbur barking out orders.

WILBUR
Hustle up, we got a show in Cleveland, in seventeen hours! That means you Fathead!

FATHEAD
(to band members)
One of these day's that man's gonna end up dead on the side of the road.

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE DISSOLVE TO

110 INT. REGAL (CHICAGO) BACKSTAGE -NIGHT 110

Ray attempts to enter the bathroom - door's locked. He knocks.

FATHEAD (V.O.)
Who is it?!

RAY
It's Ray man.

MUSICIAN IN BATHROOM (V.O.)
Ray? Who's Ray?

FATHEAD (V.O.)
The arranger...you know the blind pianist.
(calling to Ray)
Hey Ray, we're gonna be awhile...use the women's can, man.

Ray turns away humiliated.

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO:

110A EXT. POV THROUGH BUS WINDOW: OHIO HWY 36 - NIGHT 110A

110B INT. LOWELL'S TOUR BUS - NIGHT 110B

Jeff driving, while band sleeps, except Ray, who sits behind Jeff.

JEFF
The worst part of war is the memories...killin' ain't natural.

RAY
How do you handle it?

JEFF
I don't sleep good, so I drive.
(smiling)
...an' I pray a lot.

RAY
Yeah, so do I.
(feeling guilty)
...Jeff, one time I lied an' said I was at Normandy to get into a nightclub.

JEFF
Did you get in?

RAY
That's how I got here.

They share a laugh, cementing a friendship.

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO:

110B INT. EBONY LOUNGE / MUSIC CONTINUES (CLEVELAND) - NIGHT 110B

Wilber counts out singles for Ray.

WILBUR
24, 25, 26, 27, - I ain't doin' this! Count it yourself!

Wilbur slaps down money and walks away. Ray continues to count.

MUSIC ENDS AS WE CUT TO:

110C INT. EBONY LOUNGE (CLEVELAND) BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER 110C

Ray listens at the bathroom door - SUDDENLY, he pushes his way into the bathroom.

MUSICIAN IN BATHROOM (V.O.)
MAN!!!

110D INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT 110D

Fathead attempts to hold the door as Ray pushes his way in.

RAY
Whatcha y'all doin' in here, man? Y'all keep leavin' me out there alone.

MUSICIAN IN BATHROOM
Do yourself a favor an' leave.

RAY
I'll leave when I'm ready to leave...c'mon Fathead, what's goin' on, man?

FATHEAD
Ray man, this ain't for you.

RAY
Why? I know y'all in here doin' sumpin'.

FATHEAD
This ain't no weed Ray an' we ain't snortin' no bitch...this is BOY - an' Boy'll make your ass null n' void - so get on outta here, man - you don't need this.

RAY
Null n' void is better than bein' alone.

Fathead and the Musician exchange a look.

MUSICIAN IN BATHROOM
I ain't gonna wait all night. It's his funeral, man.

FATHEAD
Ray, you sure you wanna do this?
(off Ray's nod)
...alright, man, I warned you.

RAY
Yeah, I been warned.

CUT TO:

EXTREME CLOSE - UP: RAY'S FACE FILLED WITH ANTICIPATION

FATHEAD
You're gonna feel a little pinch.

Ray winces.

FATHEAD
Relax an' let the dope do the rest.

As the dope takes over Ray breathes through his mouth.

FATHEAD
Feel it, baby?

RAY
(smiling)
Yeah, I feel it.

FATHEAD
Take the ride. It's better than sex.

RAY
Nothin's better than sex.

Ray allows his head to fall back against the wall.

RAY'S DREAM - OVEREXPOSED - BLEACHED OUT:

110E *EXT. ROBINSON HOME \ BACK YARD - DAY* 110E

An adult Ray walks barefoot through the gree grass. He takes off his dark glasses. His eyes are normal. He can see. There are white sheets drying in the warm sun. For a moment, Ray relaxes in the warmth of the sun. Then a silhouette moves behind the sheets.

RAY
(smiling hopefully)
Mama?

As Ray parts the sheets, instead of Aretha he SEES George, climbing up the SAWHORSE of the rinse tub. Ray panics, reliving nightmare.

RAY
Nooo!!!

CUT TO:

111 OMITTED 111

112 OMITTED 112

113 OMITTED 113

114 OMITTED 114

115 OMITTED 115

116 EXT. CLOSE-UP: BUS WHEELS - SUPERIMPOSED OVER: 116

117 EXT. NEON SIGN FLASHING CLUB NAMES: ROYAL PEACOCK (ATLANTA), THE MEDALION (MOBILE) 117

118 EXT/INT: LOWELL'S TOUR BUS OUTSIDE GROCERY STORE-DAY 118
(Note: We'll shoot in a town that's already dressed - Griffin or Grantville.)

Wilbur climbs onto the bus with two large grocery bags.

WILBUR
I got baloney, liverwurst and cheese. This is gotta last...ain't notnin' for spooks 'tween here and Nawlins.

119 EXT. DEW DROP INN - NEW ORLEANS NEIGHBORHOOD -NIGHT (STOCK SHOT) 119

119A INT. DEW DROP INN - NIGHT / MUSIC CONTINUES 119A

As Fathead and other musicians are breaking down the stage. Ray is by his piano flirting with a FEMALE FAN IN A YELLOW DRESS.

FATHEAD
Look at Ray, y'all.

They all watch Ray as he FEELS THE WOMAN'S WRIST.

FATHEAD
See that! He feels her wrist 'cause he thinks that's the way to tell if she's good lookin'.

They all crack up as Ray leaves with the woman. Wilbur rushes up.

WILBUR
Anybody seen a fine lookin' gal in a yellow dress.

Fathead and the guys nearly bust a gut stiffling their giggles.

120 INT. SERIES OF CLOSE-UPS: RAY FEELING VARIOUS WOMEN'S WRISTS 120

120A CLOSE-UP: A MATCH FLARES AND STARTS COOKING A SPOON OF HEROIN 120A

120B INT. SMALL L.A. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY 120B

Two Musicians (guitarist & bass player) wait as Jack leads Ray in.

JACK
Ray, I'd like you to meet Oscar Moore and Johnny Miller, two thirds of...

RAY
(smiling)
The original Nat King Cole Trio.

JACK
Right, they're gonna back you up on *'Baby Let me Hold Your Hand'*.

RAY
(smiling)
Beautiful.

120C EFX SHOT: A SWINGTIME RECORD SPINS INTO FRAME. THE LABEL READS: *'BABY LET ME HOLD YOUR HAND' BY RAY CHARLES.* SEGUE AND CUT TO:

120D INT. EBONY LOUNGE (CLEVELAND,OHIO) - NIGHT 120D

Ray on stage singing *'Baby Let Me Hold Your Hand'*. Lowell and Wilbur look on, a bit alarmed by the enthusiastic audience response.

LOWELL
He ain't no threat to me as long as he sounds like a poor man's Charles Brown.

121 EXT. FLASHING SIGN - NIGHT: CLUB DESIRE (NEW ORLEANS) 121

122 INT. A SERIES: HOTEL DOORS OPENING TO REVEAL VARIOUS WOMEN 122

123 INT. A SERIES: RAY IN HOTEL DOORWAYS WITH BEDS IN B.G. 123

124 EXT. NEON SIGN: THE APOLLO (NEW YORK) - NIGHT / MUSIC CONTINUES 124

PAN DOWN, to Jeff helping Ray off Bus. He reads newspaper reviews:

JEFF
The Houston Informer says, "The blind guy conductin' Lowell Fulson's orchestra is a new cat to be watched..." an' Daddy-O in the Louisiana Weekly says, "Have you noticed how popular that blind pianist, Ray Charles has become? He's really started something."

RAY
Cut those out for me, will you Jeff?

CUT TO:

125 OMITTED 125 *

126 INT. JACK'S L.A. OFFICE - DAY 126 *

JACK
(on phone)
Ray, don't rock the boat...*'Hold My Hand'* got great notices but it ain't selling like I'd hoped...you got to stay out there with Lowell until things start to pop, okay? ...yeah, solid, hang in there, baby. * * *

As Jack hangs up his ACCOUNTANT enters.

JACK
Any checks?

JACK'S ACCOUNTANT
(shakes head 'no')
Libensky just ordered three hundred more but he still owes us from last time. * *

JACK
(frustrated)
Nothing but deadbeats...you tell that sonofabitch, unless he pays us - we ain't shipping him another record! *

CUT TO: *

127 INT. THE APOLLO \ BACKSTAGE - DAY 127

TIGHT SHOT: Three ten dollar bills, two five dollar bills, and a stack of one dollar bills.

RAY (V.O.) *
You wanna keep on countin'?

Wilbur looks up at Ray from his desk.

WILBUR
You talkin' to me, boy?

RAY
I ain't your boy...you owe me more money. *

WILBUR
(standing up)
Listen to me, you might have Jack buffaloed an' Lowell scared...but you don't fool me for a second, Blind BOY! * * *

WITHOUT WARNING, RAY JUMPS ON WILBUR, KNOCKING HIM TO THE FLOOR WHERE THEY ROLL AROUND, PUNCHING, BITING AND KICKING! * *

Jeff, Fathead and Lowell rush over to separate them.

LOWELL *
WHAT'S GOIN' ON HERE?!

WILBUR
Mr. Blind Sensation, don't like the money I paid 'im!

Jeff picks up Ray's money.

JEFF
There's fifty dollars here, Ray.

RAY
OK, but I'm 'pose to get paid in singles!

LOWELL
You know that Wilbur, why didn't you pay 'im in singles?!

WILBUR
I ain't gonna run all over the goddamn town to find singles for this clown!

Ray starts after him, Jeff restrains him as Lowell holds Wilbur.

LOWELL
From now on, I'll have singles for you Ray, if I have to get 'im myself! Now clean up this mess!

Jeff carefully places Ray's money in order and folds it.

JEFF
I put the ones on top, you've got ten of 'em, an' on the inside you've got two fives...an' three tens below that.

RAY
Thanks, man.
(taking money)
...'fore long, I'm gonna tell 'em fools to kiss my ass.

JEFF
(straightening Ray's clothes)
Give me a call when that day comes.

CUT TO:

128 EXT. BUSY HARLEM STREET (1953) - DAY 128

Well dressed urban Negroes chat after Sunday Services (a total contrast to the people of Jellyroll).

SUPER: HARLEM - 1953

RAY (V.O.)
Now after the death of Moses, it came to pass, that the Lord spake unto Joshua.

CLOSE-UP: RAY'S FINGERS MOVING ACROSS A BRAILLE BIBLE.

RAY (V.O.)
Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, the Lord thy God is with thee.

129 INT. RAY'S HARLEM, NEW YORK HOTEL ROOM (1953) - DAY 129

Ray sits alone reading to himself. Ray stops and places a Gospel record on his record player.

(Note: This will be Alec Bradsford's recording of the Gospel song that Ray will later transpose into *'I Got A Woman'*).

Ray sits back to enjoy the music, tapping out the beat on ARETHA'S WHITE BIBLE. SUDDENLY, someone KNOCKS at the door. Ray ignores the intrusion. The KNOCKING comes again.

AHMET (V.O.)
Mr. Charles!

RAY
(irritated)
Who is it?!

AHMET (V.O.)
Mr. Charles, my name is Ahmet Ertegun, I would like a moment of your time, please?

RAY
(opening door)
Whatda ya want?! I'm havin' church!

AHMET ERTEGUN stands in doorway, white, olive skinned, 29.

AHMET
I'm sorry, I could come back later.

RAY
No, you're here now, c'mon in.

Ray turns off record player as Ahmet enters.

RAY
How can I help you?

AHMET
It happens that I have acquired your contract from Jack Lauderdale and I want to speak with you about recording.

RAY
What'd ya mean, you've acquired my contract? I ain't for sale!

AHMET
May I sit down?

Ray nods his approval. Ahmet sits.

AHMET
Jack found himself a little over extended shall we say, so he was looking to unload some of his talent, and frankly, when your name came up my company, Atlantic Records, leaped at the opportunity to work with you. I'm a big fan.

RAY
Why can't I sign with another company? There's other cats that would sign me.

AHMET
I'm sure there are as well...but there is the small matter of your signed contract that we now own.
(off Ray's silence)

AHMET (cont'd)
...yes, you could possibly, through some legal wrangling, find a way out of your agreement with Jack and void his selling your contract to us for $2500, but my question to you is, why would you want to?

RAY
For more money.
(off Ahmet's look)
...I know a cat that says he'll pay me seven cents per record. Can you do that?

AHMET
Sure, I could say I'm gonna pay you fifteen cents per record...but I won't, no more than he will pay you seven cents.
(off Ray's look)
...however, what I will do, is promise you five cents per record, and then really pay you five cents per record.

Ahmet stares at Ray, who does not answer or move.

AHMET
Mr. Charles, if you think pennies, you will make pennies - think dollars and you will make dollars.

After a long beat, a smile spreads across Ray's face.

RAY
I like you, Ah...

AHMET
Ahmet.

RAY
Yeah, baby, you're cool...what kinda name is Ahmet, anyway?

AHMET
It's Turkish.

RAY
Well, Ahmet, it looks like Jack's bad luck is my good luck...'cause, I know Atlantic is a bigger label than SwingTime...'sides, I dig Atlantic, you make great records.

AHMET
(puzzled)
You could have fooled me.

RAY
Sometimes I've gotta find out which way you city boy's are comin' at me.
(charming smile)
At home, that's called country dumb.

Ahmet smiles, realizing there is more to Ray than he anticipated.

CUT TO:

130 EXT. WIDE SHOT: CROWDED NEW YORK CITY TRAFFIC - DAY 130

TOM DOWD (V.O.)
Those AF of M boys are on the clock in ten minutes!

AHMET (V.O.)
He'll be here.

131 EXT. PATSY'S RESTAURANT W. 56TH ST. - DAY 131

Ahmet stands on the street with TOM DOWD, a young, white recording engineer, and JESSE STONE, black, Atlantic's dapper arranger.

JESSE
I should've picked him up. How's a blind guy gonna find his way in New York?

AHMET
He does...and rather well.
(looking across street)
...here he comes.

On the opposite corner Ray approaches a STOP LIGHT. Jesse moves to help, but Ahmet grabs his arm.

AHMET (CONT'D)
...just watch him.

A group of women shoppers join Ray at the RED LIGHT.

AHMET
...see those women? He'll get next to them and cross when they do. Women always talk so he knows where they are...and besides, he told me: 'Who's gonna run over a bunch of women?'
(off their amazed look)
...clever, huh?

Ahmet MOVES to Ray who's successfully crossed the street.

AHMET
Good afternoon, Ray.

RAY
Ahmet, what're you doin' out here?

AHMET
I didn't want you to miss our building.

RAY
Couldn't miss it...23456.
(off Ahmet's confusion)
...two thirty-four W. 56th St.

Ahmet smiles as he leads them inside.

132 INT. ATLANTIC RECORDS RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT 132

Ahmet, Tom and Jesse listen as Ray records *"Roll With My Baby"* which sounds exactly like Nat King Cole Trio.

JESSE
(shaking his head)
Nobody wants another Nat King Cole.

CLOSE-UP: 78 RECORD BEING SMASHED BY A HAMMER

DEWEY PHILLIPS (V.O.)
In London they're ringin' out 1953 on Big Ben, but here at WHBQ in Memphis we're smashin' those old dinosaur 78's.

THE NEEDLE GOES DOWN ON A LITTLE 45 RPM DISC. *"MAMA, HE'S TREAT'N YOUR DAUGHTER MEAN" by RUTH BROWN.*

133 INT. WHBQ BROADCAST STUDIO (1954) - NIGHT 133

DJ DEWEY PHILLIPS, young, white and wild SCREAMS into mike.

DEWEY PHILLIPS
(tossing pieces of 78 away)
You hear Ruth Brown? She's comin' to ya on a little 45 RPM disc...it's the future, baby! These little doughnuts are light, portable and most important for all you kids...they're CHEAP! Take it from Dewey, it's a Revolution, BABY!!!

133A CLOSE UP: A LIT MATCH UNDER A SPOON. We HEAR *"Midnight Hour"* 133A

CUT TO:

134 INT. ATLANTIC RECORDS RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT 134

Atlantic group listens to Ray record *"Midnight Hour"*.

JESSE
(dejected)
Exactly like Charles Brown.

AHMET
(still hopeful)
Keep trying.

MUSICAL SEGUE TO RADIO JINGLE:

MUSICAL VOICES (V.O.)
Hey John R. whatcha gonna do?

135 INT. WLAC RADIO STUDIO (NASHVILLE) - NIGHT 135

DJ, JOHN R., white, purrs into the mike.

JOHN R.
I'm gonna play some Rhythm & Blues.

We HEAR *BIG MAMA THORNTON'S "HOUND DOG"*.

JOHN R. (CONT'D)
This summer Big Mama's spreadin' the news: R&B is growin' faster than any other kinda music...watch out Rudy Vallee, we're comin' through...

136 INT. ATLANTIC RECORDS RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT 136

Ahmet, Jesse and Tom watch Ray record "It Should'a Been Me".

JESSE
It's better...but there's still too much Louis Jordan in there.

"It Should'a Been Me" CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO:

137 INT. KCOH RADIO STUDIO (TEXAS) - DAY 137

Ray sits with black DJ KING BEE as record ends.

KING BEE
Alright, we're back in the WCOH studio with Atlantic recording artist, Ray Charles. So Ray, when you're not makin' your own music, who do you listen to?

RAY
The fact is, King Bee, I love Gospel.

KING BEE
Amen.

RAY
An' one of my favorites is from right here in Houston, The Cecil Shaw Singers.

KING BEE
You heard it, Ray Charles endorses Houston's own, Cecil Shaw. I'll be playin' Gospel on next week's Christmas show, but right now let's hear WCOH's #1 record, by another Atlantic artist, Clyde McPhatter's *"Money Honey"*.

Ray frowns as *"Money Honey"* blasts forth...evidence that other Atlantic artists are much more popular than he is. The phone RINGS next to King Bee. He answers it.

KING BEE
King Bee...sure baby, he's right here.
(handing phone to Ray)
...Miss Della Beatrice Antwine of The Cecil Shaw Singers.

RAY
Hello, Miss Antwine...

CUT TO:

138 EXT. CRYSTAL WHITE HOTEL ENTRANCE (TEXAS) - DAY 138

The CRYSTAL WHITE is a busy 'NEGROES ONLY' hotel. Ray exits with CECIL SHAW, a tall, elegant black man, 40's.

CECIL SHAW
Once again, I truly appreciate the plug you gave us, Mr. Charles...Gospel music needs all the help it can get.

RAY
Where's the young lady I spoke to?

CECIL SHAW
Della? She's a bit shy I'm afraid...but she's in the car, let me introduce you.

Shaw motions for DELLA BEATRICE ANTWINE to get out of the car. She's a tall, shapely black woman in her 20s with silky red hair.

CECIL SHAW
Miss Della Antwine, Mr. Ray Charles.

Della blushes as Ray FEELS HER WRIST.

DELLA
Nice to meet you, Mr. Charles.

RAY
Call me Ray. Have you two had lunch?

CECIL SHAW
My schedule's full, but maybe Della...

Della is frantically shaking her head 'no' which Ray senses.

RAY
Please join me, Miss Antwine.
(charming smile)
I don't bite - hard.

CUT TO:

139 INT. LUNCHROOM OF HOTEL CRYSTAL WHITE (TEXAS) - DAY 139

Della is quiet, eats slowly to avoid speaking. Ray's trying to draw her out.

RAY
So, who are your favorite singers?

DELLA
While I'm very partial to Dorothy Loves Coates, I love R.H. Harris of the Soul Stirrers.

RAY
I love Dorothy Coates, too.

DELLA
(to passing waiter)
Pardon me, do you have any molasses?

RAY
I knew you were from the country...I've gotta have molasses with cornbread too.

DELLA
I was raised on a farm in Texas.

RAY
My mama was raised on a farm in Florida, but I was born in Georgia.

Della does not respond.

RAY
You heard any of my records?

DELLA
Yes.

RAY
What did you think?

DELLA
They're very nice.

Ray can sense that she's being polite, but holding back.

RAY
You're not tellin' me the truth.

DELLA
I was raised to be honest, Mr. Charles.

RAY
Please, call me Ray...my mama used to say: "tell the truth an' shame the devil"...I'm a big boy, you don't like 'em, tell me.

DELLA
(puts down her fork)
It's not that I don't like 'em...it's jes' that I feel I've heard 'em before. I keep wonderin' what Ray Charles sounds like?

RAY
(laughing)
Who's he?

DELLA
If you don't know, no one does.

RAY
(stops laughing)
I ain't made a dime soundin' like myself.

DELLA
That might be true, but how successful can you be soundin' like Charles Brown an' Nat King Cole? Seems to me, people'll always buy their records first.

RAY
(standing up; anger)
I'm doin' jes' fine thank you very much!

DELLA
Sorry, but you did ask me.

RAY
I'll pay the check on my way out.

DELLA
(rises; concerned)
The door's on your left...can I help?

RAY
I know where the damn door is! Enjoy your molasses, Miss Della Antwine.

Ray turns and unaided, walks out of the lunchroom. Della is a bit shaken...but also moved by this dark, complex man.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: RAY'S HANDS POUNDING OUT COMPLICATED, ATONAL BE-BOP. PANNING UP WE SEE HIS FACE, INSCRUTABLE BEHIND DARK GLASSES, BUT WE CAN TELL FROM HIS PLAYING THAT HE'S AN ARTIST IN TORMENT... STRUGGLING WITH WHAT DELLA TOLD HIM.

140 INT. ATLANTIC RECORDS RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT 140

Ahmet walks out of the control booth and sits beside Ray.

AHMET
(tentative)
You asked about new material...I've got a song I think might be worth trying.

RAY
Who's it by?

AHMET
Well, actually I wrote it.

RAY
(mischief smile)
You Ahmet, sing it for me?

AHMET
Well I...ah.

RAY
(goating him a bit)
If you want me to sing it, teach it to me.

AHMET
Well, it's in the key of G and should have a kind of Pete Johnson stride style.

Ray starts to play a propulsive, stride piano figure. And Ahmet begins to sing in a nasal monotone - it's hilarious.

AHMET
Ah, you can talk about the pit barbeque, the band was jumpin', the people too, the Mess Around, they were doin' the Mess Around, Everybody's doin' the Mess Around.

MATCHED MUSIC AND PICTURE CUT TO:

RAY SINGS *"MESS AROUND"* - IT'S BECOME A "HOT" ROUSING NUMBER.

As Ray finishes a DARK HAIRED MAN shouts from the corner.

JERRY
Okay, Henry!!!

Everyone breaks at JERRY WEXLER's line, white, 30s.

RAY
(turning to Ahmet)
Who's that?

AHMET
(motioning Jerry over)
Ray, I'd like you to meet Jerry Wexler. He coined the term Rhythm & Blues when he was at Billboard Magazine, now he's come onboard at Atlantic as my new partner.

JERRY
(shaking Ray's hand)
Sorry. I was supposed to clam up and learn something about producing, but you got me so excited I couldn't shut up.

AHMET
(droll)
You never can, Jerry...

Ray laughs - so does Jerry. Suddenly, Tom comes out of the control booth with a very somber look on his face.

TOM DOWD
Ray, I have terrible news.

RAY
What is it?

TOM DOWD
I just got a call from Florida. Your mother died yesterday.

The smile falls away from Ray's face.

AGAIN WE HEAR GOSPEL-VOICES SINGING AN OLD SONG OF ZION AS WE CUT TO

141 EXT. NEW SHILOH BAPTIST CHURCH (1954) -DAY 141

The little church is still there, but the town of Jellyroll has grown up around it - brick buildings line the paved streets.

142 INT. NEW SHILOH BAPTIST CHURCH (1954) - DAY 142

Mary Jane's simple wooden casket sits at the church altar. Ray stands with Mr. Pit as residents of Jellyroll pour out their souls.

MR. PIT
That woman talked 'bout ya all day long...showed everybody 'em big checks you sent her..so proud of her Monkey Doodle.

RAY
(tearing up)
She's all I had left.

MR. PIT
Sing R.C., let it out.

Ray sings, and AT THIS MOMENT HE HAS AN EPIPHANY: HE DISCOVERS HIS IDENTITY. TEARS ROLL DOWN AS HE STARTS TO SING WITH REAL PASSION.

CUT TO:

143 EXT. CECIL SHAW'S HOME (TEXAS) - DAY 143

Della Antwine opens door. Ray stands there.

DELLA
Mr. Charles, what're you doin' here?

RAY
You were right, 'bout my singin'.

DELLA
I should've kept my mouth shut.

RAY
No you told me the truth, nobody's done that in a long time. May I come in?

DELLA
(starts to close door)
Mr. an' Mrs. Shaw don't allow me to have male visitors.

RAY
Wait, I wanna say somethin'...I been thinkin' 'bout makin' some changes in my life...musically an' otherwise. I need people 'round me I can trust...who understand me...musically an' otherwise.
(self-conscious)
I been thinkin' of you as the 'otherwise'.

DELLA
Mr. Charles, don't you think you're movin' a little fast? *

RAY
Please, call me Ray.
(off Della's silence)
...I'm goin' up to New York to get my business straight...then I'm comin' back to Houston to put together a band. We'll take it as slow as you want. *

Ray gives her a killer smile. Flustered, Della shuts the door.

CUT TO:

144 INT. ATLANTIC RECORDS \ OFFICES - DAY 144 *

The recording studio configuration is different - with Ahmet and Jerry's desk face one another, mikes and recording equipment pushed against the wall. Ray sits with Ahmet and Jerry at their desk. * *

AHMET
Ray, Jerry's scheduled a session for you next week...he's got some good ideas.

RAY
I want to wait awhile 'fore recordin'. I need to put together my own band.

Ahmet and Jerry look at one another, alarmed.

AHMET
Ray, it costs a lot of money to take a band out. Even Joe Morris' band is struggling, and he's had hit records.

RAY
Ahmet, you think pennies, you're gonna make pennies...you think dollars, you're gonna make dollars.

Ahmet notes the irony of his own words coming back at him.

RAY
...if I'm gonna work out my own sound, I gotta have my own band.

Jerry catches Ahmet's eye.

JERRY
Ruth Brown's got a month of dates booked in Texas - she needs a band.

RAY
I'll take it. I can do her arrangements, back her up an' be the openin' act.

AHMET
(knows when he's beat)
Okay, but it's your financial responsibility...you gotta make it pay.

RAY
Yeah, baby, I understand.

Ray's elated, but Ahmet and Jerry DO NOT look convinced.

145 INT. EMPTY REHEARSAL HALL (TEXAS) - DAY 145 *

Fathead is grousing with five other musicians as a drum stick * strikes a cymbal. Jeff stands beside Ray. *

JEFF *
The man's here, everybody listen up!

RAY
Now here's the deal: we're goin' on the * road with Ruth Brown, backin' her up...that's at night...but durin' the day, we're gonna be rehearsin' my sound - an' I do mean, rehearsin' - that's why I got you cats together, you're the best around. Anybody who thinks that's too much work an' wants to leave - there's the door.

The band members look at one another.

RAY
Jeff's the Manager. Let's go to work.

<u>WE HEAR A DOOR BELL RINGING!</u>

CUT TO: *

146 INT. CECIL SHAW'S HOME (TEXAS) - DAY 146 *

Della looks through the window. SEEING Ray, she quickly checks herself in the mirror before answering door.

RAY
(apprehensive)
Miss Antwine, it's been a week.

DELLA
(smiling)
No, it's been two weeks.

Della MOVES to Ray and gives him a passionate kiss.

RAY
(gasping for air)
Whatda 'bout Mr. an' Mrs. Shaw?

DELLA
They're in Dallas 'til Monday.

Della pulls Ray inside and SLAMS the door!

CUT TO *

147 INT. CECIL SHAW'S HOME \ DELLA'S BEDROOM (TEXAS) - DAY 147 *

Ray and Della lie in bed after making love. *

RAY
What do most people call you?

DELLA
Della...my mama calls me Della Bea.

RAY
I'm gonna call you Bea, alright?

DELLA
Hmmm...hmmm...I'd like that...

RAY
Bea, there's only been two cats I felt I could trust. I feel that way about you. *
(moved, she snuggles closer) *
You gotta always be honest...like you were before...ain't gonna do me no good you feelin' sorry for me 'cause I'm blind an' lyin' to me, you understand?

DELLA *
Yes, I understand.

RAY
Can I play somethin' for you?

DELLA
Now?

RAY
It'll only take a second.

148 INT. CECIL SHAW'S HOME \ PARLOR PIANO (TEXAS) -DAY 148 *

Ray sits at the piano, bare chested. Bea, in robe sits beside him*

RAY
(playing & singing)
I got a woman, way over town, that's good to me, oh yeah...I got a woman...

DELLA
(jumping up)
STOP IT! THAT'S SACRILEGIOUS!

RAY
Whatda ya mean?!

DELLA
It's a church song Alec Bradford sings.

RAY
I know who sings it....but I changed it...you told me to go find my voice... I did, an' this is it!

DELLA
It ain't right! To change Gospel into this...this...

RAY
What...? Devil music?
(Bea's silence is her answer)
C'mon Bea, I grew up singin' Gospel and blues - it's who I am...if Ray Charles's gonna sing in his own style, it's gotta be natural, don't it?
(embracing Della)
...'sides I'm singin' 'bout my feelin' for you...what's more natural than that?

Relenting, Della lays her head on Ray's shoulder.

CUT TO:

149 EXT. ROYAL PEACOCK NIGHTCLUB \ ATLANTA (1954) - RAINY DAY 149

SUPER: ATLANTA - TWO MONTHS LATER

Ahmet and Jerry dash across a rainy Atlanta street.

JERRY
I'm not gonna be the one to tell him...

AHMET
It was your idea to encourage his band.

JERRY
How could I know that Ruth Brown would have to leave the tour...

150 INT. ROYAL PEACOCK NIGHTCLUB \ ATLANTA - RAINY DAY 150

Ahmet and Jerry come through the door, dripping wet. Before their eyes can adjust to the darkened room, Ray counts out a downbeat and the waiting band jumps into *'I Got A Woman'*.

The two producers are stunned. They are listening to a totally new Ray Charles, with a completely unique style and vision.

AHMET
This has hit written all over it.

JERRY
We gotta get this on Wax...NOW!!!

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: 45RPM RECORD SPINNING ON TURNTABLE.

151 INT. WINS RADIO STUDIO - DAY 151

ALAN FREED turns up *'I Got A Woman'* and shouts into mic:

ALAN FREED
Hear that New York? Sounds huge doesn't it, but only seven cats are playin' on this record. This is the new Ray Charles ...ain't nothin' out there like it.

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO:

152 INT. JUSTICE OF THE PEACE OFFICE (TEXAS) - DAY 152

Ray and Della stand before JUSTICE OF THE PEACE, female, black, 50's. Ahmet, Jerry, Jeff and Fathead are in attendance.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE
...what God has brought together, let no man put asunder...

Ray reaches over and takes Della's hand. Tears in her eyes.

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO:

152A EXT. RAY AND DELLA'S HOME (TEXAS) - ESTABLISHING - DAY 152A

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: DRESSER DRAWER BEING PULLED OPEN.

RAY (V.O.)
This is your side, over here is mine.

153 INT. RAY AND DELLA'S HOME \ BEDROOM (TEXAS) - DAY 153

Ray and Della stand between two chest of drawers.

RAY
Bea, let's respect each other's privacy ...what I mean is, let's not go lookin' for trouble...I told any gal I might've been messin' with not to call me again.

DELLA
I've told anyone from my past as well.

RAY
(embraces her)
Atlantic's put the band with a bookin' agent. We're goin' on tour to promote the record. Why don't you come with me?

DELLA
Uh-uh, I love you, I hate the road.

RAY
Bea, I think we need to talk 'bout the road an' what goes on out there...

DELLA
Ray, don't think 'cause I sing Gospel I haven't seen carousin' on the road.

RAY
That's why I need you, I like sex.

DELLA
(caressing his cheek)
Ray, I married you 'cause I love you an' I trust you. I understand you're a workin' musician an' that you've gotta travel, but I'm old fashion. I see myself providin' a safe an' lovin' home for you off the road.

RAY
Bea, I'm jes' as old fashion, an' I'm gonna be a good husband. I'm not gonna...

DELLA
(cutting him off)
Shhh, don't make no promises...I ain't no fool. All I ask's that you never to bring 'the road' into our home, the home I'll make for you an' our children.
(kissing Ray's cheek)
Now, can I please put my things away?

RAY
(teasing)
Good thing I cleaned out the closet, all 'em bags you done bought in here.

Della gives Ray a playful shove and punches his shoulder.

A DAYMON RUNYANESQUE VOICE (V.O.)
Kid, anytime the Shaw Agency doesn't fulfill its duties toward you, you don't need the Shaw agency...

154 INT. SHAW AGENCY (NEW YORK CITY - 1954) - DAY 154

We SEE BILLY SHAW, 60's, white, his son MILT SHAW, 30's, white and Ray and Jeff.

BILLY SHAW
...but anytime you don't perform for us, we don't need you, understand?

RAY
Sounds fair enough to me.

BILLY SHAW
(shaking Ray's hand)
Welcome to the Shaw agency...my son Milt will work with you.

Ray shakes their hands.

MILT SHAW
We already got you booked on a seven city tour in the Carolinas with Roy Milton's Solid Senders and Tangula, the Snake Girl.

CUT TO:

155 INT. DEW DROP INN NIGHTCLUB STAGE (NEW ORLEANS) - NIGHT 155

Ray is on stage performing *'A Fool For You'*...he uses his charm and clever ad libs to draw the audience into the song. The women shout back sexy responses to Ray's seductively added lyrics.

RAY
I know you told me...such a long time ago...that you didn't want me...you didn't love me no more...I wanna know, oh what makes me be, do you believe child, I'm a fool for you...

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: A BLACK BAPTIST MINISTER SHOUTS WITH FURY AND OUTRAGE.

BAPTIST MINISTER
This man is bringin' the wrath of GOD down on 'imself!...stealin' from the Lord an' usin' it for the Devil's work!

156 INT. BLACK SOUTHERN BAPTIST CHURCH (TEXAS) - DAY 156

He hurls fire and brimstone from the pulpit at his congregation.

CONGREGATION
AMEN!

BAPTIST MINISTER (CONT'D)
It's the most outrageous thing I've heard of since Simon the magician offered Peter money for the Holy Ghost...an' like Simon, Ray Charles'll perish, for what he's doin!

A STOIC DELLA SITS AMIDST THE PARISHIONERS.

A few members get up and move away from Della. Della tries to maintain her pride and hold back the tears.

MILT SHAW (V.O.)
On Tuesday, New York for 24 hours to record, then you're booked for 10 dates in

157 INT. SHAW AGENCY (NEW YORK CITY) - DAY 157

Milt Shaw shouts into the phone.

MILT SHAW
Oklahoma and Texas with Big Joe Turner, Bill Doggett and Lowell Fulson.

157A ROADSIDE SOMEWHERE - DAY 157A

Ray's on a pay phone while the band sleeps in a DeSoto Station wagon. Jeff leans against Rays '53 Ford sedan.

RAY
Am I billed above or below Lowell Fulson?

MILT SHAW
Above, baby, above...

Ray smiles and hangs up, and turns to Jeff.

RAY
Jeff, I wanna add a female vocalist to the show. I want somebody with church experience but not attitude, dig?
(smiling)

RAY (cont'd)
...an' she's gotta be good lookin' - audiences like that.

CUT TO: *

CLOSE-UP: MARY ANN FISHER, SHAPELY, BLACK, 20S

158 INT. DEW DROP INN \ EMPTY NIGHTCLUB - DAY 158 *

Ray and Jeff listen to Mary Ann, on stage, shouting out a jumpy, up-tempo version of *'Drown In My Own Tears'*.

RAY
(clapping for her to stop)
Good, good, I like that. What's your name again, sweetheart?

MARY ANN
Mary Ann Fisher.

RAY
Well Mary Ann, I like your sound...but I gotta know, how'd you feel 'bout music that has a church sound to it?

MARY ANN
I love God an' he loves me...but, I stopped goin' to church, when the Reverend got my cousin's wife pregnant.

RAY
Good, Jeff's the road manager, he takes care of gettin' you paid, fed an' bed, but the music's my thing.

MARY ANN
Yessir.

RAY
I know bringin' a woman into the band might 'cause trouble...I can't tell you who you should or shouldn't be messin' with, that's your business.

MARY ANN
That's right, it is...why bring it up, are you the messin' type? *

RAY
(nervous laughter)
Hold on, sweetheart, I've got a pregnant wife at home, who I love, you dig? *

MARY ANN
Fair enough.

CUT TO: *

159 INT. RAY AND DELLA'S HOME (TEXAS) - DAY 159 *

A pregnant Della lays, reading a book on child birth - HEARING a key in the door, she sits up, SEES Ray enter and leaps into his arms. *

DELLA
Ray!!!

RAY
Careful, your belly.

DELLA
My belly's fine, what're you doin' home?!

RAY
Our next gig's 200 miles away, so I had Jeff drive me home. We got 17 hours...

DELLA
(kissing Ray's neck)
Seventeen hours, seventeen minutes, I don't care - as long as you are here.

CUT TO: *

CLOSE-UP: CHICKEN FRIED STEAK WITH BLACK EYED PEAS AND RICE. *

RAY (V.O.) *
I dreamed 'bout your chicken fried steak. *

DELLA (V.O.) *
If I barbecued a phone book, you'd eat it. *

160 INT. RAY AND DELLA'S HOME \ KITCHEN (TEXAS) - NIGHT 160 *

Ray laughs as he SITS AT THE KITCHEN TABLE devouring his meal. * Della smiles, watching him eat. After a long beat, Ray stops. *

RAY
Bea, I don't know if you heard, but there's been problems on the road, 'cause of me mixin' church music with the blues.

DELLA *
(hiding her own experience)
Really?

RAY
These people talk like I don't love God. You believe that I do, don't you?

DELLA
Of course, I do. Ray, you know how people like to tear somebody down when they're on their way up.

RAY
I know, but sometimes it hurts.

DELLA
Let me ask you somethin'. Have people stopped buyin' your records?

RAY
No, Ahmet says we're climbin' the charts. *

DELLA
There's your answer.
(off Ray's look)
Blessin's are from God, God ain't gonna bless what He's against...now is He? *
(kissing him on the forhead) *

DELLA (cont'd)
You got a lot of music rollin' 'round inside you. You go make it, don't be listenin' to anythin' people might say.

RAY
You're the best thing's ever happened t'me

CUT TO:

INSERT CLOSE-UP: SHIRTS BEING PACKED

DELLA (V.O.)
I'm gonna put the powder blue shirts on the left an' the white on the right.

161 INT. RAY AND DELLA'S HOME \ BEDROOM (TEXAS) - DAY 161

Della is packing Ray's bags. Ray enters.

RAY
We're gonna be addin' a girl singer.

DELLA
She got a nice voice?

RAY
Not as good as yours. I wish you'd come sing with me.

DELLA
Can't you jes' picture that, me wobblin' around on stage, big as a house?

RAY
(puts arms around her)
I can picture us makin' sweet love.

Ray starts to gently stroke her stomach and kiss her neck.

DELLA
(pushing Ray away)
Don't get started, Jeff'll be here soon.

As Della playfully pushes Ray away, he over exaggerates her strength as he flops onto bed. Bea laughs and enters the bathroom.

DELLA
I'll get your shavin' kit.

HEARING that, Ray's smile vanishes as he JUMPS to his feet.

RAY
Bea, no! No, that's okay!

Ray runs into the bathroom. Della stands, dumfounded with tears in her eyes, holding his works (for shooting heroin) in her hands.

DELLA
Why, Ray? Why? Why this?

RAY
Bea, you don't need to know.

DELLA
I'm your wife. Of course I need to know.

Ray takes the works from Della's hands.

DELLA
I can't believe you're doin' this.

Della walks out in shock. Ray follows her into the living room where Jeff is gathering the bags.

JEFF
Hi, Della Bea, he ready?

DELLA
(teary eyed)
Jeff, did you know 'bout this?
(off Jeff's puzzled look)
...the dope - did you know?!

Jeff DOES NOT have to answer, his look says 'yes he knew'.

RAY
(entering)
Leave Jeff outta this! Jeff, why don't you wait outside.

After Jeff takes bags and leaves.

RAY
Bea, what can I say? I like gettin' high an' I ain't gonna stop usin'.

DELLA
(tearfully)
Whatda 'bout me an' the baby? Whatda 'bout us, Ray?

RAY
This ain't nothin' to be concerned about. I'll leave it alone when I get ready. I ain't hurtin' nobody.

DELLA
It's hurtin' me 'cause I love you, Ray!

RAY
If you love me, you'll understand. I ain't sellin' no drugs. I ain't givin' it to nobody else. It's strictly my thing.
(off Della's look)
I promised you I'd keep the things I do on the road outta your face.

DELLA
This ain't the road! This is our home!

RAY
I'm sorry, Bea, I wanted to see you an' forgot to leave it with the band...
(taking her into his arms)
...I won't let it happen again - promise.

Della closes her eyes as the tears come. She lays her head on Ray's shoulder. She loves him. She can't leave him.

RAY (V.O.)
(singing)
If I call her on the telephone, tell her that I'm all alone, By the time I count from one to four, I hear her:

CUT TO: *

162 INT. JOE'S SKYLINE CLUB / MUSIC CONTINUES - NIGHT 162 *

As the Drummer bangs out 1,2,3,4, Ray takes band into a big finale*

RAY
...on my door. In the evenin' when the sun goes down, when there is nobody else around, she kisses me an' she holds me tight an' tells me Daddy everything's all right...that's why I know, yes I know, Hallelujah I just Love Her So...

JEFF AND MARY ANN WATCH OFF STAGE

JEFF
Rehearsal's are always at two - don't be late or you'll be fined.

MARY ANN
(watching Ray)
He's a whole lotta man, ain't he?

JEFF *
An' he's a lotta married man, too.

MARY ANN
(sly smile)
I don't care what she done 'fore he left...it ain't gonna last that big boy for no two whole months on the road.

CUT TO: *

162A INT. ATLANTIC RECORDS OFFICE (NEW YORK CITY) - DAY 162A *

INTERCUT: Ahmet on phone with Ray backstage(Joe's Skyline). *

AHMET *
Hallelujah's going to be your second hit. *
We gotta have a follow up? *

RAY
Ahmet, I'm workin' six nights a week, when am I gonna have time to write?

AHMET
Make time. We can't lose the momentum. *

RAY
Alright, I'll see what I can do.

Frustrated, Ray hangs up as Mary Ann walks past.

RAY
Mary Ann, 'member your audition song?

MARY ANN
'Drown In My Own Tears', you like it? *

CUT TO: *

163 INT. JOE'S SKYLINE \ EMPTY NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT 163 *

Ray works out a new arrangement of *'Drown In My Own Tears'* - it is* clearly much different and better than Mary Ann's version - a bluesy hymn. Mary Ann watches in astonishment as this genius creates. *

MARY ANN *
Man, if I hadn't seen it, I wouldn't have *
believe it - Baby, you're amazin'. *

She sits next to Ray, rubbing her thigh provocatively against Ray's. He looks over but continues to compose.

164 INT. ATLANTIC RECORDING STUDIO (1955) - NIGHT 164

Ray, backed up by Mary Ann and two band members (SINGING FALSETTO) recording his arrangement of *'Drown In My Own Tears'*.

In the CONTROL BOOTH Jerry looks at Ahmet and smiles.

JERRY
It's brilliant! I've never seen somebody on such a creative roll...

Ahmet nods...his heavy-lidded eyes never stray from his prodigy.

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE FADE TO BLACK: *

IN THE DARKNESS WE HEAR THE SOUNDS OF TWO PEOPLE LAUGHING AND * WHISPERING INTIMATE THINGS TO EACH OTHER - THEN A KNOCK ON THE DOOR.

RAY (V.O.)
Yeah!

JEFF (V.O.)
You've got a telephone call.

RAY (V.O.)
Take a message.

JEFF (V.O.)
It's Della Bea.

165 INT. THERESA HOTEL \ HARLEM \ RAY'S DARK ROOM - MORNING 165

Ray, silhouetted by curtains, gets out of bed.

RAY
What's she want?

JEFF (V.O.)
C'mon, man, I ain't gonna lie to Bea!

A smiling Mary Ann sits up behind Ray.

MARY ANN
Uh-oh, is that the wife?

RAY
Be quiet.
(to Jeff)
...I'll be right there!

Mary Ann grins and lays back down. *

CUT TO: *

CLOSE-UP: INFANT RAY CHARLES ROBINSON, JR..

DELLA (V.O.)
You wanna hold 'im?

166 INT. DALLAS HOSPITAL \ COLORED MATERNITY WARD (1955) - DAY 166 *

A nervous Ray stands with Jeff next to Della and the Baby.

RAY
Does he have all his fingers an' toes?

DELLA
Yes, he has all of 'em.

Della notices look on Ray's agonized face.

DELLA
Ray, what's wrong?

RAY
Is he blind? Can he see?

DELLA
No, he ain't blind, he can see...you have a beautiful son, I named 'im Cedric.

RAY
Cedric?! Give me that baby!

Della gives Ray his son. INSTRUMENTAL INTRO TO *'MARY ANN'*

RAY
(cradling baby in his arms)
Ain't gonna be nobody in our family named Cedric! No this boy's name is Ray Jr.!

DELLA
Alright, Ray.

RAY
Hey lil' Ray, I'm your daddy.

Ray tickles Ray Jr..

RAY (V.O.)
Oh Mary Ann, girl you sho' look fine...

CUT TO: *

CLOSE-UP: RAY AS HE SINGS A SENSUAL VERSION OF THE SONG 'MARY ANN' LIVE ON STAGE.

RAY
Oh, Oh, Oh, Mary Ann, I could love you all the time...

167 INT. ROYAL PEACOCK NIGHTCLUB (ATLANTA, GA.) - NIGHT 167 *

As Ray's silky voice coos suggestive lyrics, MARY ANN shimmies with sexual anticipation creating electricity the audience picks up on.*

'MARY ANN' PLAYS UNDER MONTAGE OF:

168 EXT. DALLAS NEIGHBORHOOD (1955) - DAY 168 *

Ray and Della push baby buggy - Ray is the picture of fatherhood.

169 EXT. SOUTHERN TWO LANE HIGHWAY - NIGHT 169 *

Ray's Ford sedan rolls through a Southern town with the Band's * DeSoto Wagon in Tow.(2nd Unit) *

170 INT. RAY'S '53 FORD / MUSIC CONTINUES -NIGHT 170 *

Jeff drives. Ray and Mary Ann in the back seat. Mary Ann kisses Ray on the face and neck. Camera stays on Ray's face as Mary Ann continues to moving down below frame.

171 INT. RAY AND DELLA'S HOME \ DALLAS - DAY 171 *

Ray composing at his Fender Rhodes...Della, feeding Ray Jr. sits * next to him and lays her head on his shoulder

172 EXT. NEW ORLEANS HOTEL - NIGHT 172 *

Jeff and the band members are loading onto bus. Ray and Fathead wait as a skittish and resentful Mary Ann gets out of a cab.

FATHEAD
Did you get it?

MARY ANN
Yeah, I got it...but I thought the police * was gonna catch me this time...Listen, I * ain't gettin' you no more dope - ever!

Mary Ann shoves the package at Fathead as they board the bus. *

RAY
(kissing her cheek)
But my girl came through anyway.

AS MUSIC ENDS WE CUT TO: *

173 INT. ATLANTIC RECORDS NEW OFFICES \ 137 W.57 ST. - DAY 173

A proud Ahmet and Jerry show Ray into their new offices. *

AHMET
What do you think of our new digs? *

RAY
13757 gonna take some gettin' use too. *

JERRY *
But you will still do all of your recording with Tom at 23456. *

RAY
I really dig that Doc Pomus tune, you sent me, *'Lonely Avenue'*, too bad the band's in Dallas, else I'd record it now. *

JERRY
I can put together some studio cats now - you don't like what you get, we junk it. *

RAY
(tapping temple)
I'm hearin' somethin' up here...somethin' I ain't seen before...a dance 'tween a man an' three woman, can you dig it? * *

AHMET
(laughing)
Yeah, I can definitely dig that.

RAY
(smiling slyly)
Minglin' our voices, Ahmet, that's all.

JERRY
(to Ahmet)
The Cookies are right down the hall.

Ahmet nods his approval.

CUT TO: *

CLOSE-UP: THE COOKIES - MARGIE HENDRICKS, ETHEL MCRAE AND PAT LYLE, BLACK, LATE TEENS, HUM THREE PART HARMONY TO RAY'S *'LONELY AVENUE'*:

RAY
'My covers feel like lead. My pillow feels like stone. I toss an' turn so every night. Ain't used to bein' alone'.

174 INT. ATLANTIC RECORDS RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT 174

Tom Dowd is busy at his controls. Eyes closed, Ahmet and Jerry soak up this unbelievably sensual new sound. * *

COOKIES
Such a Lonely Avenue, A Lonely Avenue...

TOM DOWD
It's perfect...I'll have it in one take. *

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO: *

175 INT. HORN AND HARDART RESTAURANT \ NEW YORK - DAY 175

HORN and HARDART is a restaurant with walls lined with vending machines. The Cookies are leading Ray and Jeff along the walls.

MARGIE
(demonstrating)
All you gotta do is put your money in, open the door an' out comes a hot meal.

RAY
Can I get a bottle of bourbon?

MARGIE
Not less you know the kitchen help.

They laugh and MOVE to a TABLE.

RAY
Let's talk business, I like for y'all to join me on the road.

MARGIE
An' how much are you gonna pay us?

RAY
(smiling)
Honey, Brother Ray'll take care of you. *

MARGIE
My mama taught me to take care of myself. We need to know 'bout the money, honey.

As the other Cookies nod in agreement, Jeff smiles.

RAY
How's twenty a week sound?

MARGIE
Not as good as forty a week - each.

RAY
Forty?! Each?!

MARGIE
You heard me.

RAY
(thinks a beat)
I'll give you twenty-five, each. *

MARGIE
We'll take thirty.

RAY
Girl, I better say yeah 'fore you've done talked me outta my drawers.

MARGIE
That comes later.

PAT
Lawdy girl, hush your mouth!

RAY *
Deal.

As Ray shakes Margie's hand, he FEELS HER WRIST.

RAY (V.O.) *
From now on we'll do four part harmony...

CUT TO: *

176 INT. REHEARSAL HALL (NEW YORK CITY) - DAY 176 *

We SEE Mary Ann as she looks suspiciously at The Cookies.

RAY
Ethel you'll sing alto, Margie - tenor, Pat - soprano, an' Mary Ann - bass.

MARY ANN
Ray, I'm a soprano, I ain't no bass.

MARGIE
Where I come from we sing everythin'.

MARY ANN
We're talkin' 'bout singin' here, sugar, not hog callin'.

Some of the band members start to laugh.

MARGIE
Who you callin' a hog?

Margie starts towards Mary Ann. Jeff jumps in between.

JEFF
Cut it out, less y'all wanna get fined!

Mary Ann and Margie glare at one another.

RAY
Mary Ann, I've written somethin' special for you. I'm givin' you a solo.

MARY ANN
Solo?

RAY
Yeah, baby.

Mary Ann looks back at Margie with a look of triumph.

MARY ANN (V.O.)
What kind of man are you?...why do I love you so?

CUT TO:

177 INT. THE REGAL CLUB \ STAGE (1956) - NIGHT 177

Mary Ann on stage doing a steamy rendition of *'What Kind Of Man'*. However, the lyrics Ray has written foretell a painful tale.

MARY ANN
...when you don't love me no more.

<u>MONTAGE - AS MARY ANN SINGS, SHE WATCHES HER OWN DOWNFALL</u>:

178 INT. REHEARSAL HALL (NEW YORK) - DAY 178

Margie sits with Ray at the piano. She wipes perspiration from his brow, then drops her hand, resting it on Ray's thigh.

MARY ANN
What kind of man are you?...why can't I let you go?

179 INT. RAY AND DELLA'S DALLAS HOME (1956) - DAY 179 *

Ray holds out his arms as Ray Jr. takes his first step.

MARY ANN
What kind of man are you? I jes' can't satisfy...no matter how hard I try.

180 EXT. ALLY BEHIND REHEARSAL HALL -DAY 180 *

The Band members, including Mary Ann gather around a strange vehicle, a Chevy Wagon that's been CHOPPED in the middle and extended to be the new Band Bus. * * *

FATHEAD *
It looks like a Weenie. *

As the group cracks up, Mary Ann looks up the alley where she SEES* Jeff holding the door open to a new 56 Caddie for Ray and Margie. *

MARY ANN *
What kind of man are you? Why do you tell me lies....

181 SOUTHERN HOTEL \ HALLWAY - LATE NIGHT 181 *

Elevator doors open as MARGIE and RAY, locked in a kiss, stumble * down the hall. MARY ANN watches from her own door as Margie guides Ray into her room. Mary Ann slowly closes her door.

MARY ANN
I wanna know, I wanna know, I wanna know
Oh, Oh, Oh, about you...

182 EXT. SOUTHERN HOTEL (1957) - DAY 182 *

A Taxi Driver places Mary Ann's bags in cab, holds the door. *

MARY ANN *
Wait a minute. *

Mary Ann walks over to Ray's '56 Cadillac and hurls the bottle * through the front window...then jumps into cab and speeds away. *

MUSIC ENDS AS WE FADE TO BLACK:

<u>THE SOUND SEXUAL CLIMAX</u>:

DELLA (V.O.)
I missed you, Ray.

FADE UP: *

183 INT. RAY AND DELLA'S HOME \ BEDROOM (TEXAS) - NIGHT 183 *

Della turns on the light and reaches for her robe. *

DELLA *
You hungry?

RAY
No, I'm tired.

DELLA
You should take some time off.

RAY
(patting her pregnant stomach))
I can't take no time off.

Bea leans over and kisses him tenderly.

RAY (V.O.)
(singing)
If you don't want to, you don' have to...

COOKIES (V.O.)
Get in Trouble...

CUT TO:

184 INT. ATLANTIC RECORDS RECORDING STUDIO - DAY 184

Ray & Company are recording again, but in the booth Jerry is agitated, reaches over and turns on the 'TALK BACK':

JERRY
Cut! Cut!

RAY
(confused)
What is it?

JERRY
Ray, I'd like to double the bass line.

RAY
(irritated)
The bass is fine.

Ray counts the band down again, but Jerry hits 'talk back' again.

JERRY
I'm sorry Ray, but I think we need....

RAY
(slams piano and stands up)
If I'm doin' a session, I'm doin' it my way, or I ain't doin' it at all!

Angered by Ray's outburst Jerry looks to Ahmet.

AHMET
(motions for him to sit)
Let him do his thing...we'll do ours.

Jerry sits down as the band kicks in again.

185 *'LEAVE MY WOMAN ALONE'* PLAYS THROUGHOUT SEQUENCE 185

186 INT. ATLANTIC OFFICES - DAY 186

INTERCUT Jerry and Ahmet as they play the promotion game.

JERRY
Poppa Stoppa, I'm gonna give you the New Orleans exclusive on the Ray Charles next smash:'Leave My Woman Alone'

AHMET
John R., are you Hip to the Tip? You've got the first break on Ray's new single...

JERRY
Daddy Zenas, we always deliver you the finest USDA Prime cuts.

AHMET
Is Hunter Hancock still the Monster DJ of L.A. or have you become a mouse?

187 INT. SHAW AGENCY (NEW YORK CITY) -DAY 187

Milt Shaw screaming into the telephone.

MILT SHAW
This gonna be the biggest R&B Tour ever. We're talkin' Fats Dominino, The Five Satins, Laverne Baker and Ray Charles. All top acts so I need Top Dollar you dig?

188 INT. EBONY LOUNGE \ STAGE - NIGHT / MUSIC CONTINUES 188

Dancers are in overdrive as Ray, Margie and the Cookies burn.

DELLA (V.O.)
Happy birthday to you, happy birthday...

189 INT. RAY AND DELLA'S HOME (1958) - DAY / *'WOMAN ALONE'* CONTINUES 189

A pregnant Della sings *'Happy Birthday'* to a THREE YEAR OLD Ray Jr. Then helps him blow out the candles. RAY SENIOR IS NOT PRESENT.

DELLA
Happy birthday, Ray Jr., Happy birthday to you...

MUSIC ENDS AS WE CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: A SYRINGE FALLS INTO A PORCELAIN SINK.

190 INT. CLEVELAND HOTEL \ DARK BATHROOM - NIGHT \ MUSIC IN B.G. 190

Ray loosens belt from his arm. Margie stands in doorway.

RAY
C'mere baby, you know how daddy likes it after he takes his medicine.

MARGIE
Ray, I'm dressed an' ready to go.

Ray stands up and pulls Margie to him.

RAY
You can hike your dress up.

MARGIE
I'll hike it up if you let me try some?

RAY
Baby, you know I can't, this'll take you places you don't wanna go.

MARGIE
Why do you do it then?

RAY
It helps me create.

MARGIE
(seductively nibs his ear)
Baby, I wanna share everythin' with ya.

RAY
(shrugging her off)
Margie, you listen to me! If I ever hear 'bout you messin' with dope, you're outta this band! You believe that more than you believe in Jesus! This ain't for little girls!

MARGIE
I ain't no little girl!

RAY
(pulling Margie to him)
No you ain't...you're all woman.

Ray spins Margie around, passionately kissing her neck. We HEAR the rustling of her dress. Margie closes her eyes, lost in the moment.

(V.O.) FATHEAD'S SEXY SAX INTRO TO *'THE RIGHT TIME'* AS WE CUT TO:

191 INT. ATLANTIC RECORDS RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT 191

Margie and Ray, totally into each other sing *'THE RIGHT TIME'*.

RAY
You know the Night Time...

RAELLETTS
Night and day...

RAY
Is the right time...

RAELLETTS
Night and day...

RAY
To be with the one you love...

In the booth Ahmet, Tom, Jesse and Jerry watch Ray jerk & scratch.

JESSE
Look at him...his knees are shaking, he's got the junkie itch...he's hooked.

JERRY
I know, but listen to the sound that's coming out.

JESSE
You can't trust a junkie to deliver.

AHMET
Normally I'd agree, but he's never missed a date?

AHMET (cont'd)
Aren't his arrangements written with painstaking precision? He works his ass off, the results are brilliant.

Jesse nods begrudgingly. They watch in awe as we CUT TO: *

192 INT. THERESA HOTEL \ HARLEM \ RAY'S ROOM - DAY / MUSIC CONTINUES * 192

Ray and Fathead are splitting up capsules of heroin.

RAY
This weight feels off, man.

FATHEAD
Don't start that, the weight ain't off!

RAY
If the weight feels off, it's off! You get messed up 'fore you cop, an' they take advantage of you!

FATHEAD
Why don't you go next time?!
(picking up his capsules)
You know what man, I ain't messin' up my high tonight by arguin' with you!

RAY
Man, tie me off, don't leave me hangin'!

FATHEAD
You take care of yourself!

Fathead stomps out. *

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO: *

193 INT. DALLAS HOSPITAL \ COLORED MATERNITY WARD (1959) - DAY 193 *

Della places Ray's newest son DAVID into his arms.

DELLA
His name is David.

RAY
(smiling)
That's a good name...

CUT TO: *

194 INT. THERESA HOTEL \ HARLEM \ MARGIE'S ROOM - NIGHT 194 *

Ray opens the door, spilling light from the hallway onto Margie in bed. She sits up with open arms.

MARGIE
I missed you, daddy, c'mere.

Ray enters - starts removing his clothes. *

195 INT. BROWNSVILLE, OHIO NIGHTCLUB (1959) - NIGHT 195 *

Ray and Margie finish *'The Right Time'*, and the elegantly dressed * Black crowd give them a big hand. They obviously want more.

FATHEAD
That was the last song in the book...we still got twenty minutes left...

JEFF
(nods at owner checking watch)
That guy's gonna hold us to every second of the contract.

RAY
I don't know where I'm goin' but tell everybody to follow my lead.

Ray starts a low bounce bass riff on the electric piano. The drummer comes in on his big cymbal, and the band picks up on this up-tempo groove. The audience digs it and starts dancing. Ray sings:

RAY
Hey mama, don't you treat me wrong, love ya daddy all night long...hey, hey, alright now. What'd I say?

The energy of the crowd starts to build with the song.

RAY
See the girl with the diamond ring, she knows how to shake that thang...hey, hey, What'd I Say.

A WOMAN gets up on a table top and starts shimmying, her spaghetti straps fall off her shoulders.

RAY
Tell your mama, tell your pa, I'm gonna send you back to Arkansas.

As Ray finishes, the whole club goes crazy, wanting more.

RAY
Hold it y'all, hold it!
(yelling to Margie)
...this time y'all follow along.

Ray starts a series of moans and groans which the Raelletts mimic creating a sexy call and response. Everyone again goes berserk!

CLUB GOER
(screaming to Jeff)
WHERE CAN I BUY THAT RECORD??!

CUT TO:

196 INT. ATLANTIC RECORDS RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT / MUSIC CONTINUES 196

Ray sits with Ahmet, Jerry and Tom Dowd listening to the playback.

JERRY
It's great. It's just too long.

AHMET
Some of the language is risque. But I don't want to lose any of it?

TOM DOWD
I could cut it into two parts...one on Side A and the other on Side B, but it's never been done before....

RAY
(smiling)
I like it.

AHMET
Do it...

JERRY
We're not releasing it 'til summer...I want kids blasting it out of their transistor radios on every beach in the country...it'll be the smash of 1959!!

MUSIC CONTINUES UNDER MONTAGE:

197 EFX SHOT: BILLBOARD HEADLINE SPINS INTO FRAME: *"RAY CHARLES' SEXY 'WHAT'D I SAY' HIS STRONGEST POP RECORD TO DATE."* 197

198 INT. SHAW AGENCY (NEW YORK CITY) - DAY 198

Milt Shaw on Telephone.

MILT SHAW
Forget second billing...Ray headlines at $1000 per or you got no deal!

199 EFX SHOT: ANIMATION OF BILLBOARD POP CART SHOWS ITS UPWARD PROGRESS FROM #82 TO #43 TO #26 TO #15 TO #6

200 INT. SHAW AGENCY (NEW YORK) - DAY 200

Milt Shaw on the phone.

MILT SHAW
He's off the Chitlin' Circuit - Downbeat Magazine just voted him Best Male Jazz Vocalist by a two to one margin....

201 EXT. BEACH PARTY - NIGHT 201

Jerry's prophesy comes true: white teenagers Watusi to *'What'd I Say'* around a bonfire...It's a Revolution...total sexual liberation.

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO:

202 EXT. PASADENA FREEWAY (1959) - DAY 202

Ray's new Purple '59 Cadillac cruises down this famous LA freeway with the empty Weenie bring up the rear.

202A INT. RAY'S 59 CADILLAC - DAY 202A

We SEE Jeff driving Ray in his new Purple Cadillac. Della and a FOUR YEAR OLD RAY JR.and infant David are in the back seat.

DELLA
But Ray, I don't know nobody in L.A..

RAY
Bea, L.A. ain't like no place else. It's a place where the Negro can spread his wings. It smells like success.

DELLA
But all of my family's in Texas.

RAY
That's why we're movin' to L.A..

'WHAT'D I SAY' ENDS AS WE CUT TO:

203 EXT. RAY AND DELLA'S L.A. HOME \ HEPBURN STREET - DAY 203

Jeff pulls in front of a modest house. Ray gets out with Della as Jeff motions LeRoy Cooper driving the Weenie to continue on.

JEFF
Drop the Weenie at the garage for repairs.

RAY
Well, how does it look?

DELLA
It's lovely, Ray.

RAY
Lemme show you the inside.

204 INT. RAY AND DELLA'S HOME \ LOS ANGELES - DAY 204

Della and Ray enter. It's completely furnished.

DELLA
(impressed)
Oh Ray.

Ray leads her towards: A CHRISTMAS TREE, loaded with ornaments, plenty of toys and presents underneath.

DELLA
It's October!

RAY
I wanted to celebrate early 'cause the band's workin' durin' the Holidays.

DELLA
(tears in her eyes)
I can't believe you.

Della embraces Ray, giving him a big kiss.

JEFF
Can we come in?

DELLA
Children, look what your Daddy's done.

A sleepy Ray Jr. wakes up fast when he SEES the Christmas tree, tearing into his presents. The phone RINGS! Jeff answers.

JEFF
Hello.
(listens; irked)
...how did you get this number?

Della looks over. Jeff tries to mask any reaction.

JEFF
Ray, it's for you.

Ray takes the telephone.

RAY
Yeah.

Della SEES the strain on Ray's face, she takes Ray Jr.'s hand.

DELLA
(loud enough for Ray to hear)
C'mon, Ray Jr., you can help your mother change your brother's wet diaper. *

Della pulls a whining Ray Jr out of the room. *

205 INT. HILTON HOTEL ROOM - DAY - BEGIN INTRO TO *'BELIEVE TO MY SOUL'* *

Margie in hotel INTERCUTS with Ray at home. *

MARGIE
I flew out to surprise you.

RAY
Yeah, well it ain't a good surprise.

MARGIE
Don't be mad...c'mon over. *
(seductive)
I'm at the Hilton, I'll make it up to you. *

RAY
Are you outta your mind? I'm here with my wife an' children!

MARGIE
On the road, they call me Mrs. Charles.

RAY
This is my home! This ain't the road!

Ray SLAMS down the phone. *

206 INT. BEDROOM - DAY / MUSIC CONTINUES 206 *

Della, fights back her emotions, as she changes David's diaper.

RAY (V.O.) *
Need any help? *

A smile spreads across Della's face as she SEES Ray in doorway.

DELLA
(picking up David)
No, all finished.

Ray Jr. lets out a yell as Ray lifts him high in the air.

RAY
I got two weeks 'fore my next session...we got time for Thanksgiving an' Christmas!

Della beams as he kisses her on the cheek.

INSTRUMENTAL INTRO CONCLUDES AS WE CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: RAY SINGING AN INCREDIBLY BLUESY *'I BELIEVE TO MY SOUL'*

RAY
One of these days, it won't be long.
You're gonna look for me, I'll be gone.

207 INT. ATLANTIC RECORDS RECORDING STUDIO - NIGHT 207

Ray at the Fender Rhodes backed up by the Raelletts, bass and drums. Ahmet, Jerry and Tom Dowd look out from the control room.

RAELLETTS
'I Believe, Yes I Believe'...

RAY
'I Believe to my Soul now, you're tryin' to make a fool out of Me...'

RAELLETTS
'I Believe it, I Believe it.'

RAY
(stops playing)
Hold it...the harmony's off.

As the Raelletts standby bored, Margie pours something from a brown paper bag into a cup.

RAY
Let's do it again.

But before he can count the band down, Tom Dowd plays back the Raelets track only. Ray's rocked in his seat.

RAY
Whoa, what's that, pardner?

TOM DOWD
It's an eight track, Ray...I just got it. We can record each part separately.

RAY
(jumping up)
Whoa Nelly, I gotta see that...
(hears Raelett's giggling)
...what y'all laughin' at?

MARGIE
(slurred speech)
Nothin' sweetie, we're jes' singin'.

RAY
Jeff c'mere.
(Jeff leans in; Ray whispers)
...get her outta here, she's drunk.

JEFF
(going over to Margie)
C'mon, Margie, let's go.

MARGIE
What're you doin'?
(to Ray)
...c'mon, baby, I'm alright, I'm cool.

Suddenly, Ray HEARS the other Raelletts giggling.

RAY
What y'all laughin' at?! You know what?! All of y'all get the hell outta here!!!

MARGIE
Baby, I'm alright.

RAY
(steely, pissed)
Take her back to the hotel.

Humiliated, Margie follows the other Raelets out. Ray immediately turns his attention back to business.

RAY
OK Tom, let's try this thing out...you give me my vocals, I'll do the four part harmony.

TOM DOWD (TALK-BACK)
But, Ray, the girls....

RAY
Don't you worry 'bout it baby, jes' play my voice.

TOM DOWD
(starting tape playback)
Alright, Ray.

RAY'S VOICE ON TAPE
Goin' round with your head so hard, think I'm gonna have t'use my rod.

RAY
(FALSETTO VOICE)
I Believe, Yes I Believe...

IN A SERIES OF MATCHED DISSOLVES WE SEE RAY SING FOUR HARMONIES, EACH FAULTLESSLY IN TURN AND FEMININE SOUNDING:

208 INT. ATLANTIC RECORDS \ RECORDING BOOTH - LATER THAT DAY 208

TOM DOWD
(stunned)
I've seen guys overdub...but this guy...

AHMET
Is Ray Charles.

CUT TO:

A FLORAL WREATH IN THE SHAPE OF A JEWISH STAR ADORNS A CASKET

209 EXT. JEWISH CEMETERY \ BILLY SHAW'S FUNERAL - OVERCAST DAY 209 *

A Cantor sings the final Kadish for Billy Shaw. Entertainment * royalty in attendance, both black and white: Dizzy Gillespie, LaVern Baker, Ruth Brown...Ahmet, Jerry and other record executives. *

Jeff leads Ray past Milt Shaw and his mother LEE SHAW. *

RAY
(taking Lee's hand)
Billy was family...always treated me fair. *

LEE SHAW
Thank you Ray...he was so proud of you.

MILT SHAW
(shaking Rays hand)
Thanks Ray, those are kinds words. *

RAY
They're true. *

Milt Shaw guides Ray away from Ahmet, Jerry and the others. *

MILT SHAW *
Ray, you know that your contract with Atlantic is expiring in three months.

RAY
Yeah, Ahmet's workin' on a new one.

MILT SHAW *
Yeah well, before we jump back in that pond I thought I'd find out what else is out there...so I had a very productive * chat with ABC/Paramount.

RAY
Who said you could do that?! Atlantic's family, just like the Shaw Agency.

MILT SHAW *
My job is to get you the best deal possible, and ABC is mighty interested...

Milt Shaw clams up...waiting for Ray to take the bait. *

RAY
How interested?

MILT SHAW *
How about a $50,000 advance...each year * for three years. *
You produce your own records. They'll * deduct recording costs and give you 75%. *

Ray and Jeff are stunned, but they remain silent.

MILT SHAW *
Will you put Ahmet off until I can talk * things out a little further with ABC?

RAY *
My mama always said, you can talk to people, ain't no harm in talkin'.

Milt Shaw smiles. He's got the answer he wants. Slapping Ray on the back he hurries off when he sees Ahmet waiting at Ray's Limo.

AHMET
Ray, why don't we have dinner tonight?

RAY
(getting into car)
Sorry Ahmet. We got a gig in Raleigh.

AHMET
(leaning down into car)
We got a title for your new LP: *'The Genius of Ray Charles'*...like it?

RAY
(humbled)
Hard not to like.

AHMET
It's true, you know.
(Ray looks away, guilty)
...call me when your schedule opens up, I'll fly out and meet you on the road.

RAY
Yeah, man, I'll call you.

Ray closes the door. Jerry walks up as the limo pulls away.

JERRY
Did you talk to him about the contract?

AHMET
He'll sign. Atlantic is family.

(V.O.) RAY'S BRASS SECTION BLOWS *'LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL'*.

CUT TO:

210 INT. NEW ORLEANS'S AUDITORIUM - NIGHT 210

The auditorium is packed and grooving. SUDDENLY, Ray waves his arms.

RAY
Cut! Cut!
(turning to audience)
...I wanna apologize to you folks, you paid your good money to hear us tonight an' my horn section keeps messin' up ...so we're gonna start again an' do it right, OK Trombone?

The trombone player glares back at Ray as he counts them off.

JUMP CUT TO:

211 INT. NEW ORLEANS'S AUDITORIUM \ BACKSTAGE 211

As Jeff leads Ray off stage the announcer shouts to a cheering audiences *'Let's Hear it for the High Priest, Ray Charles'*.

RAY
(stopping)
Hold it, Jeff. I gotta talk to Paul.

JEFF
Here? What's goin' on?

As the band members come off stage.

JEFF
Paul come here.

PAUL, black, trombone player walks over.

RAY
I told you not to come on stage high! You was messin' up all night! Get your gear an' get out - you're fired!

Ray signals for Jeff to lead him off, but Paul follows.

PAUL
This ain't fair, Ray...you get high!!

RAY
I handle my business! I ain't never late! I don't let what I do come on that stage!

PAUL
Gimme a break, I got a family.

RAY
So have I.

PAUL
(stops, shouts after Ray)
To Hell with you, man...you ain't human!

RAY
You should've caught that Jeff! I shouldn't have to deal with this!

JEFF
You ain't makin' it no easier on me...

RAY
What's that s'pose to mean?

JEFF
Your drawers are raggedly, man...you're takin' out what's happenin' 'tween you an' Ahmet on the band...an' you got different rules for you, Margie and Fathead. Now if you wanna fire me too, go 'head.

RAY
(beat)
Do your job, man. Pay 'im off an' get 'im the hell outta here.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: SAM CLARK, PRESIDENT OF ABC RECORDS

SAM CLARK
Mr. Charles, we are very excited about the possibility of you joining the ABC family.

212 INT. SAM CLARK'S SUITE \ ABC-PARAMOUNT RECORDS (NYC - 1960) 212DAY *

Ray, Jeff and Milt Shaw sit surrounded by ABC Executives. *

SAM CLARK
You realize that moving from an Indie label to a Major will mean that you'll sell many more records, as well as draw bigger crowds at better clubs...white crowds as well as Negro.

RAY
I've been with Atlantic for a lot of years. I'd like to give 'em a chance to match your offer.

SAM CLARK
Certainly, but I doubt they'll be able to. Remember we're giving you a 'state of the art' deal.

RAY
I appreciate that, but I been thinkin', since I'm producin' my own music, I should own my own masters.

Everyone's jaw drops, including Jeff and Milt Shaw. *

SAM CLARK
Mr. Charles...we've never done that before, no record company has... *

RAY
(smiling)
I understand, Mr. Clark, but that's what I'd like if I'm gonna come to ABC.

Clark looks around at his Executives...they're sweating...they've let the rabbit into the briar patch.

JERRY (V.O.)
(bursting with anger)
I knew the rumors were true!

CUT TO: *

213 INT. ATLANTIC RECORDS NEW OFFICES \ 137 W.57 ST. - DAY 213 *

Ahmet sits calmly while Jerry explodes at Ray.

JERRY
Ahmet wouldn't believe it. You know why Ray?! Because he believes that we are a family here at Atlantic! I believe that too. But obviously you don't!

Ray sits quietly listening to Jerry's tirade.

JERRY
...don't you see that you're selling yourself to a soulless, white bread organization that doesn't give a damn about Negro music?!
(dripping with sarcasm)
...Sam Clark's a front man, a corporate slug!

JERRY (cont'd)
He wouldn't know the difference between Earl Hines and Art Tatum!
(clapping his hands together)
...we let you grow here Ray, we let you do your thing!...we can't take credit for your talent, but goddamn it, we nourished it, we watered it - we deserve better than this!

RAY
Don't think I don't 'ppreciate what you guys've done, I do. Ahmet, I'll always be proud of the work we did together. But Atlantic's done pretty good money wise on my records, haven't they?

AHMET
Yes, Ray, we've done very well.

RAY
Well, you taught me that makin' records is a business, and everybody's gotta make the best deal they can. Seventy-five cents out of every dollar an' ownin' my own masters is a damn good deal. Can you guys match it?

AHMET
We'd love to Ray, but we just can't...that's a better deal than Sinatra's got.
(shaking Ray's hand)
...I'm proud of you.

Jerry gets up mumbling and storms out SLAMMING the door.

AHMET
(smiling)
...I guess those boys over at ABC got a taste of country dumb.

Ray laughs...they'll be friends forever.

(V.O.) WE HEAR THE LUSH STRING ARRANGEMENT OF *'GEORGIA ON MY MIND'* ...TOTALLY DIFFERENT THAN ANYTHING RAY'S DONE BEFORE.

CUT TO: *

214 INT. ABC RECORDING STUDIO (LOS ANGELES) - NIGHT 214 *

A symphonic string section and choir surround Ray at the piano. * The Sound is mainstream Pop until Ray opens his mouth and colors it Blue. Jeff, Fathead and Margie peer out from the green room. *

RAY *
Georgia, Georgia, the whole day through...Just an Old Sweet Song Keeps Georgia on my mind. *

CHOIR
Georgia On My Mind...

215 INT. ABC RECORDING STUDIO \ GREEN ROOM - DAY 215 *

Isolated from the action, Fathead and Margie accost Jeff. *

FATHEAD
Listen to that slop! I thought Ray said ABC wouldn't force nothin' on 'im!

JEFF
They ain't, it's Ray idea, sumpin' new.

MARGIE
What about us? Why can't we be part of his new thang?!

FATHEAD
Yeah, we gotta eat too.

Jeff shrugs as Margie takes a swig from bottle in a paper bag. *

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO: *

216 TV SCREEN: DICK CLARK ANNOUNCES AMERICAN BANDSTAND'S "TOP TEN". *

DICK CLARK
Staying at the top spot for the third week in a row is Ray Charles' *'Georgia On My Mind'*, his first #1 record.

217 EXT. RAY AND DELLA'S L.A. HOME \ KITCHEN \ HEPBURN ST. - DAY217

As Della watches TV while feeding David in a high chair, a SIX YEAR OLD RAY JR. excitedly watches his father assemble his new bicycle. With great fascination Ray Jr. follows his father in and out of the utility room as he grabs various tools.

RAY JR.
Daddy?

RAY
Yeah.

RAY JR.
If you can't see nothin', how can you walk around an' not hit nothin'?

RAY
(smiling)
Bea, turn that box down so he can hear.

Bea turns off the TV, and Ray points to his shoes.

RAY
See...I got hard heels...so when I walk... *
(starts to walk)
...I listen...if I pass a wall I hear the echo of my heels off the wall...
(walks in front of door)
...when I come to an open space the sound * changes...so my ears make up for my eyes. *

RAY JR.
(still puzzled)
Huh, uh...

RAY
(tightening last bolt) *
Here you go, your bike's, ready.

First Bea and then little Ray starts laughing.

RAY
What?...What is it?

Ray steps back to reveal the bike with it's handlebars on backward. They all share a good laugh on Ray.

CUT TO:

218 *EFX MONTAGE: "RUBY" STARTS TO PLAY UNDER PHOTOS OF WHITE* 218
MUSICAL VENUES FEATURING *"RAY CHARLES"* ON THEIR MARQUEES:
PALLADIUM (HOLLYWOOD), THE LATIN CASINO CHERRY HILL (NEW JERSEY),
TINGLEY COLISEUM (ALBUQUERQUE), MELODY SKATELAND (INDIANAPOLIS)

DOWNBEAT REPORTER (V.O.)
Ray, how do you feel finally getting your first #1 record.

RAY (V.O.)
I love to compete, and I love to win.

219 EXT. BACKSTAGE AT THE NEWPORT JAZZ FESTIVAL - DAY 219

Ray sits backstage with a DOWNBEAT REPORTER.

DOWNBEAT REPORTER
With appearances on *'Playboy After Dark'* and the *'Perry Como Show'* you seem to have broken through commercially.

RAY
It's nice to finally be on Network TV.

DOWNBEAT REPORTER
But some critics are saying that all those violins have diluted your talent...that you've lost the power of your old hard-hitting gospel style.

RAY
(smiling)
Sounds like you've been talkin' to Jerry Wexler. There ain't no difference 'tween the old Ray and the new Ray. As long as I'm feelin' what I'm singin', it don't matter what the style is...

CUT TO:

A HI-FI NEEDLE IS YANKED OFF AN LP - *"RUBY"* SCRATCHES TO A STOP. A HAGGARD MARGIE SITS UP INTO FRAME AND POURS HERSELF A DRINK:

RAY (V.O.)
You ready to work now?

220 INT. THERESA HOTEL \ HARLEM \ RAY'S ROOM - NIGHT 220

Ray sits down behind the Fender Rhodes.

MARGIE
(nauseous)
Work on what?

RAY
Everybody's sayin' I'm middle of the road. Can you believe I still gotta prove I can make another R&B hit .

RAY (cont'd)
(pats seat next to him)
...c'mon I'm gonna need you on this one.

Margie rushes into the bathroom and throws up.

RAY
(angry)
If you're drunk, jes' leave!

Margie comes out of the bathroom wiping her face.

MARGIE
I ain't drunk, Ray...I'm pregnant!
(off Ray's look)
...that's right, I'm havin' your baby.

RAY
I don't think that's a good idea.

MARGIE
Whatda ya want me to do, get rid of it?

RAY
Well?

Margie SLAPS Ray across the face.

MARGIE
'Cause, I ain't your precious Bea! I ain't good enough to have your baby?!
(paces wildly)
...you lay up in my bed every night, not hers! Well, I'm gonna have this baby!

RAY
(moving to Margie)
Alright...alright...I'll take care of you an' the baby.

MARGIE
No Ray, it's gonna cost you more than that. I want you to leave Bea, an' be with me an' our baby.

RAY
(stepping back)
You knew the rules when this thing started...on the road, it was me an' you, but I ain't leavin' my family.

MARGIE
(laughing)
You're a damn stupid fool...'tween the dope, the music an' me...you've already left your family - you jes' don't know it.
(abruptly stops laughing)
From now on, it's strictly business 'tween us. Let's get to work, I need money.

Smiling, he starts playing a riff, handing her a lyric sheet.

RAY
Yeah Baby...keep that anger....

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: MARGIE AND RAELETS AT THEIR SASSY BEST:

MARGIE & RAELLETTS
Hit the Road Jack, And Don'tcha Come Back No More, No More, Hit The Road Jack, And Don'tcha come back No More.

221 INT. THE KENTUCKY CLUB \ STAGE - NIGHT / MUSIC CONTINUES 221

Ray and the band are on stage.

RAY
Old Woman, Old Woman, don'tcha treat me so mean, You're the meanest old woman that I ever seen. I guess if you say so, I'll have to pack my things and go.

MARGIE
That's right!

MARGIE & RAELLETTS
Hit the Road Jack...

The song takes on special meaning to Ray and Margie.

RAY
Oh baby, listen, don't treat me this way, I'll be back on my feet someday.

MARGIE
...don't care if you do, 'cause it's understood, you ain't got no money, an' you jes' ain't no good.

The audience is laughing, eating it up, but Margie sings with a ferocious passion that's palpable.

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO:

222 INT. SAM CLARK'S ABC OFFICE - DAY 222

SAM CLARK
(on telephone)
Ray, *'Hit The Road'* has just become our second #1. ABC is taking ads in all the trades. And congratulations on the Grammy Nomination...I know you'll win...

CUT TO:

223 INT. THERESA HOTEL \ HARLEM \ RAY'S ROOM - NIGHT 223

Ray lies on the bed talking to Sam...he's slurring/stoned. The TV plays as Margie packs her suitcase.

RAY
That's nice...Good-bye Sam.

MARGIE
I'll stop by Jeff's room an' get my money on my way out.

RAY
Margie, you don't have to leave.

MARGIE
Yes I do, Ray! I'm sick of doin' what's good for you! I'm gonna do what's good for me! I'm goin' solo.

RAY
(grabbing Margie's arm)
Nobody leaves Ray Charles!

MARGIE
(pulling away)
Jes' watch me!

Margie grabs suitcase and leaves. Ray's too stoned to stop her.

WHITE OUT:

BLEED-INTO: RAY'S DREAM - OVEREXPOSED, BLEACHED OUT.

224 *EXT. ROBINSON'S BACKYARD -DAY* 224

A strong wind blows the sheets on the line. The CAMERA moves toward the wash tubs - closer and closer. We can see the soapy water cresting up in waves. As the lens reaches the foamy surface SUDDENLY GEORGE'S GHOULISH HEAD SHOOTS OUT OF THE WATER.

CUT TO:

225 OMITTED 225

226 OMITTED 226

227 OMITTED 227

CUT TO:

STUDENTS MARCHING CARRYING PROTEST SIGNS: "NO MORE SEGREGATED SHOWS", "EQUAL RIGHTS FOR NEGROS IN GEORGIA" "BOYCOTT JIM CROW":

228 EXT. AUGUSTA CIVIC AUDITORIUM (1962) - DAY 228

Ray's tour bus pulls up as 100 BLACK STUDENT PROTESTERS shout out slogans. The WHITE PROMOTER, surrounded by a phalanx of cops pushes through the demonstrators as Ray and the band exit the bus.

WHITE PROMOTER
Ray, I'm sorry 'bout all of this...you and your boys just proceed into the building ...there's refreshments and drinks inside.

STUDENT PROTESTER
(pushing against cops)
Mr. Charles, are you aware that the show tonight is segregated? The dance floor's only open to whites, an' Negroes are limited to the balcony.

RAY
That's the way it is man, this is Georgia.

STUDENT PROTESTER
You think we don't know that...Negroes are persecuted in this state every day.

RAY
Ain't a thing I can do. I'm just an entertainer tryin' to make a livin...we all gotta play Jim Crow down here.

STUDENT PROTESTER
It doesn't have to stay that way Mr. Charles. You could be the first to stand up and change things...right here and now.

RAY
Sorry, I can't help ya....

Ray continues to walk with the White Promoter.

WHITE PROMOTER
Hear that boy? Now get your black ass on outta here, with that nonsense!

RAY
(stopping; turning around)
You know, he's right - somebody has to be the first...Jeff get 'em back on the bus.

WHITE PROMOTER
What?!

JEFF
Y'all heard the man! Back on the bus!

The band members start to load back onto the bus.

WHITE PROMOTER
Ray, you got a contract...break it and you'll never play Georgia again...I'm serious...I'll sue your ass and win.

RAY
You do what you gotta do.
(turns back to the student)
Thanks son, you woke me up.

229 INT. RAY'S TOURING BUS - DAY 229

As RAY steps onto the bus, Band members crowd around their boss.

LEROY COOPER
Righteous man...

FATHEAD
'Bout time, we did somethin'...

Jeff sits down next to Ray.

JEFF
I'm proud of you boss.

RAY
(distant, thoughtful)
You hear that Margie's touring Texas?

JEFF
Let it go, man.

230 EFX MONTAGE OF HEADLINES: (*"UNCHAIN MY HEART"* PLAYS IN B.G.) 230 *

EBONY - *"RAY CHARLES FIRST TO REFUSE TO PLAY JIM CROW THEATER"* *
JET MAGAZINE - *"RAY CHARLES FINED IN GEORGIA COURT* *
PITTSBURGH COURIER - *"AMERICA'S HIGH PRIEST OF JAZZ DEALS AUGUSTA'S RACIAL BIAS A RESOUNDING SLAP IN THE FACE"*

231 INT. SHAW AGENCY (NEW YORK CITY) - DAY 231 *

Ray sits with Milt Shaw. *

MILT SHAW *
Ray, this is more than a fine. This guy's got juice at the capital. He can get you barred from ever playing Georgia again, *
but he'll drop this if you play the gig. *

RAY
Not if it's segregated. My people made me. *
They gotta be able to sit where they want. *

MILT SHAW *
You can't afford this...Georgia's our *
highest grossing state. *

RAY
Larry, I ain't never playin' a Jim Crow joint again, you got it?

MILT SHAW *
Yes, I got it.

232 EFX SHOT: HEADLINE SPINS INTO FRAME (*'UNCHAIN' CONTINUES*) 232 *

LOUISVILLE DEFENDER - *"GEORGIA BANS RAY CHARLES FOR LIFE"* *

CUT TO: *

233 INT. INDIANAPOLIS AUDITORIUM (1963) - NIGHT 233 *

Ray and Band on stage burning up *'Unchain My Heart'*. The mostly White audience goes wild...several kids break from their seats and begin dancing in front of the stage. Police try to stop them, but the kids keep dancing, they're having too much fun.

RAY
'So Unchain, unchain baby set me free...'

RAELLETTS *
'Won't you set me free...'

THE CAMERA PANS ACROSS TO THE NEW RAELETS - NO MARGIE. *

MUSIC FADES AS WE FADE TO BLACK AND CUT TO: *

234 A MATCH IS STRUCK IN THE DARKNESS AS RAY COOKS HIS DRUGS. 234

WOMAN (V.O.) *
Hurry up, Ray, I'm getting cold.

RAY
Sure, sweetheart.

Ray blows the match out.

235 INT. RAY'S HOTEL ROOM \ INDIANAPOLIS - DAY 235 *

The WOMAN sits up in bed as Ray comes out of the bathroom. Ray goes to the Fender Rhodes...picks out the melody to *'HIT THE ROAD JACK'*.

WOMAN
Ray, aren't you coming back to bed?

RAY
(thinking of Margie) *
In a minute. *

WOMAN
Now, Ray...come be with me? *

RAY
(exasperated)
You know what, why don't you leave.

WOMAN
No, I refuse to...you promised me.

Ray angrily explodes from the piano stool! He drags the woman from the bed, towards the door. The woman grabs what clothes she can before Ray pushes her out into the hall and SLAMS DOOR. Ray goes back to the piano. WE HEAR KNOCKING AT THE DOOR...

RAY
I said, get the hell out!!

POLICEMAN#1 (V.O.) *
Mr. Charles?

RAY
(looking up)
Yeah, who is it?

POLICEMAN#1 (V.O.) *
Western Union.

RAY
Who?!

POLICEMAN#1 (V.O.) *
...I got a telegram for you.

Ray goes back and opens the door - BLAM! Two police officers charge in KNOCKING Ray to the floor, handcuffing him.

CUT TO: *

CLOSE-UP: THROUGH PRISON BARS/MESH WE SEE RAY LED INTO ROOM.

236 INT. INDIANAPOLIS JAIL INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY 236

Two White Indianapolis Policeman push Ray down into a chair .

RAY
What's the hell's this all 'bout?

Policemen empty evidence envelope on table: a syringe, 10 empty heroin capsules, and a cold cream jar filled with marijuana.

POLICEMAN#1 *
You're a dope fiend...that's a felony.

RAY
It's my body...I wasn't hurtin' nobody.

POLICEMAN#2
Wrong Nigger!...your jungle music is poisoning our kids' minds. I woulda busted your ass for throwing a gum wrapper on the sidewalk, but you just made it easier by being a junkie. We're gonna put your 'burr head' away for a long time.

RAY
(starting to break down)
What about my wife and kids? I got responsibilities.

POLICEMAN#1
I got a good idea...why don't you talk about it to some people we got outside.

The other cop opens the door and several reporters and photographers rush into the room, flashing pictures and inundating him with questions. Ray's devastated.

A CAMERA FLASH WHITES OUT SCREEN - THEN FADE UP ON:

237 INT. RAY AND DELLA'S L.A. HOME \ HEPBURN STREET - DAY 237

Ray sits at the Fender Rhodes. He starts singing Hank Williams' *'Cheatin' Heart'*, its sad and mournful, lyrics, the perfect refection of his mood. Della enters. She sits beside him.

DELLA
Ray, I know you hurtin', but...

RAY
Bea, don't preach to me now, please.

DELLA
I ain't gonna preach...I'm gonna tell you the truth: you're killin' yourself, an' part of me is dyin' with you. I kept the kids home from school today.

RAY
Why? 'Cause of me?! These mean-ass kids 'round here, are pickin' on 'em. That's why we're movin' to Beverly Hills!

DELLA
I'm not movin' to no Beverly Hills. I don't know nobody up there an' children are jes' as mean there as they would be anyplace. It's not where we live, it's what you're doin' to yourself...our sons adore their father...you don't want 'em doin' what you're doin', do you?

RAY
No, I don't...but Bea...

DELLA
No 'buts' Ray! You said you wanted me to always tell you the truth, an' the truth is: 'the wages of sin are death...'

RAY
You sound like mama.

Before Bea can respond the telephone RINGS. Ray picks it up:

RAY
Don't jive me, Milt.
(big smile)
That's great news...thank Sam for me...
(light bulb goes off)
...oh, an' Milt, do me a favor an' send me all the Country songs you can find...I wanna hear everything...yeah, Country....

Ray hangs up - his whole attitude is changed...he's energized.

RAY
ABC's lawyers got the charges dropped. The cops didn't have a warrant.

DELLA
(shaking her head)
I don't understand...

RAY
(cynical)
Just like you can buy grades of silk, you can buy grades of law.

DELLA
That don't make it right, Ray.

RAY
It's the world, Bea. Listen, we're movin'...maybe not to Beverly Hills, but I gotta get the boys someplace where all this poison won't affect 'em.

DELLA
There's no place on earth like that.

RAY
(already thinking ahead)
I got a great idea for my next album...somethin' really wild.

SAM CLARK (V.O.)
COUNTRY MUSIC???

CUT TO:

238 INT. SAM CLARK'S OFFICE \ ABC-PARAMOUNT RECORDS - DAY 238

Sam Clark, Milt Shaw, Jeff and Ray.

RAY
Yes, Sam...I've always sung country...
(smiling fondly)
I used to play with the Florida Playboys.

SAM CLARK
(trying to be diplomatic)
We've made a big investment in you Ray, and it's paying off handsomely...for both of us I might add. I'm concerned that we might lose your longtime fans.

RAY
Well Sam, you got a point there, an' I thought 'bout it. But the reason I want to do this is that I think I can gain more than I lose.
(deadpan)
...an' when I signed my contract, it was agreed I could choose my own music...

Sam looks at his Executives...Rays got them again.

CUT TO:

239 TIGHT SHOT: JOE ADAMS, A PENCIL THIN MUSTACHE, ELEGANT CUFF LINKS ON FRENCH CUFFS, GOLD RING - PURRS INTO THE MICROPHONE:

JOE ADAMS
Hellllooooo St Louis, my name's Joe Adams, and it's my pleasure to present to you the man you've all been waiting for -The MAIN ATTRACTION...The 'High Priest of Jazz', the 'KING of Rhythm an' Blues', and now THE CREATOR of 'Modern Sounds in Country and Western'. I bring you the 'Genius' himself: RAAAY CHAAALEZZZ.

240 INT. ST. LOUIS THEATER \ STAGE - NIGHT 240

The lights come up on the Band. The presentation is much slicker * than we've seen before: bigger band with string section and chorus in Tuxedos & evening gowns. Ray's at a grand piano.

****RAY'S TOUR WILL VISIT VARIOUS CITIES IN THIS SECTION, BUT WE WILL NEVER SEE THE AUDIENCES AND AUDITORIUMS. THE CAMERA WILL FOCUS ON THE STAGE - ON RAY AND THE PERFORMERS. THEIR COSTUMES WILL CHANGE, AS WILL A FEW PIECES OF SET DRESSING, BUT WE WILL ONLY HEAR THE AUDIENCES... GROWING IN SIZE AND VOLUME.

RAY
(smiles, oozing with charm)
Good evenin' Ladies an' Gentlemen, we're gonna do some new material tonight...
(Band plays Train Intro) *
...it's a little different than what you're used to hearin' us do, but I learned a long time ago that ya gotta *"Keep Movin' On"*.
(sings)
"I warned ya Baby from time to time, but ya just wouldn't listen, wouldn't pay me no mind, so I'm Movin' on."

RAELLETTS *
"He's Movin' On..."

RAY
"I'm Movin' On..."

RAELLETTS *
"Roll on, Roll on..." *

241 EXT. AUDITORIUM \ NEW ORLEANS - NIGHT / MUSIC CONTINUES 241 *

Exhausted band members climb onto tour bus as Jeff helps driver get the last of the equipment loaded. He heads back inside.

JEFF
Good work Johnny...get ready to roll.

242 INT. NEW ORLEANS AUDITORIUM \ RAY'S DRESSING ROOM 242

Joe Adams is pouring Ray a cup of coffee as Jeff enters.

JEFF
OK, Ray we're loaded up.

RAY
Jeff, meet Joe Adams. I used to listen to 'im on the radio...*'The Mayor Of Melody'*.
(Joe & Jeff shake)
Joe's gonna be MC...an' help me out.

JEFF
(radar goes up)
Whatda 'bout the band?

RAY
That's still your thing.

Ray goes into the bathroom.

JOE ADAMS
Ray wants to tighten' up the ship...
(confidentially))
...you know what I mean...none of us want a repeat of Indianapolis.

Jeff doesn't like the implication, but before he can respond, Ray comes out of the bathroom and takes Joe's arm to leave.

RAY
Joe's been advisin' me 'bout real estate. I just bought some land on Washington Blvd for my headquarters, an' I'm gonna build Bea a new house in Baldwin Hills.

JEFF
(picking up Ray's jacket)
Boss, don't be leavin' your medicine.

Obviously, Ray's dope's in there. Ray grabs it.

RAY
Ooops, thanks man. Joe's chartered a Cessna...we'll see you an' the Band tomorrow night in Chicago...

They leave Jeff to contemplate his future.

"MOVIN' ON" CONTINUES TO PLAY AS WE CUT TO:

243 EFX: A BILLBOARD MAGAZINE AD: "THE NATION'S HOTTEST SELLING ALBUM 'MODERN SOUNDS IN COUNTRY & WESTERN' ENTERS CHARTS AT #50"

244 CLOSE-UPS OF JOE ADAMS: "HELLO CHICAGO"..."HELLO PITTSBURGH" 244

245 ANIMATION: ALBUM CHART POSITION JUMPING: #21 -#10 - #5. 245

"MOVIN' ON" FINISHES AS WE CUT TO:

246 INT. PHILADELPHIA THEATER \ STAGE (1963) - NIGHT 246 *

The audience goes wild, but suddenly the lights dim and a single * spotlight falls on Ray. Miraculously, the crowd quiets down. Ray* senses the change, then hears Joe calling out a series of numbers in the wings: "8, 27, 6" as the chorus intros *"You Don't Know Me".* *

RAY
"You give your hand to me, an' then you say hello, an' I can hardly speak, my heart is beatin' so, an' anyone could tell you think you know me well, but you don't know me."

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO:

247 INT. PHILADELPHIA THEATER \ DRESSING ROOM (1963) - NIGHT 247 *

Ray and Joe are chowing down on FRIED CHICKEN as Jeff stows Ray's costume in travel trunk.

RAY
Joe, what was all that countin' about? *

JOE ADAMS
I was cuing the lights down...didn't you hear the audience get quiet?

RAY
Yeah, who told you to do that?

JOE ADAMS
Nobody. You shouldn't have to scream when you're doing a ballad.

RAY
D'ya know how great it is for somebody to do what needs to be done...an' not say, 'it ain't my job?'

Joe beams as Jeff SLAMS the trunk together and leaves.

"YOU DON'T KNOW ME" CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO: *

248 BILLBOARD HEADLINE SPINS OUT TO CAMERA: "RAY CHARLES COUNTRY2ALBUM TOPS CHARTS...1,000,000 UNITS SOLD AND STILL GOING."

CUT TO: *

CLOSE-UP: NEWBORN ROBERT ROBINSON (1964) *

249 INT. L.A. HOSPITAL \ DELLA'S ROOM - DAY \ MUSIC CONTINUES 249

Ray holds the baby nervously.

RAY
Is he....?

DELLA
He's perfect...he looks just like you...

Ray gently starts to kiss and play with his new son, ROBERT. *

RAY
Hello, Robert.

DELLA
(tentative)
Ray, the boys miss you so much...

RAY
(stiffens)
We got big expenses on the office buildin' an' the new house is costin'...

DELLA
(interrupting)
I don't need no new house....

RAY
(sincere but firm)
Bea, this album is gonna be my biggest ever...I got to ride it...

Della's not going to win this one. As she turns away we hear:

250 THE RAZZAMATAZZ BAND INTRO TO *"BYE BYE LOVE"*... 250 *

JOE ADAMS (V.O.) *
Bon jour Paris, Je suis Jacques Adams.

251 INT. OLYMPIA THEATER \ PARIS, FRANCES (1964) - EVENING 251 *

JOE ADAMS
Here is the man all of Europe has been screaming for. Madams and monsieur, I give you Monsieur Ray Charles!

The lights pop on revealing the Raelets out front jiving:

RAELLETTS *
Bye, Bye Love, Bye Bye Happiness, Hello Loneliness, I think I'm a gonna cry.

RAY
There goes my Baby with someone new, she sure looks happy, I sure am blue, she was my baby till he stepped in, good-bye to romance that might have been.

RAY & RAELLETTS *
Bye Bye love...

In the wings Jeff looks over and sees Ahmet enjoying the show.

JEFF
Ahmet, how ya doin', Ray's gonna be... *

AHMET
(shaking hands)
No, don't tell him I was here...I've got the Drifters over at the Gard du Nord...
(smiling at Ray)
I just wanted to see him 'live' again. *

A roar goes up from the French Audience.

CUT TO: *

252 EXT. L'ETOILE - PARIS, FRANCE (1964) (STOCK SHOT) - DAY 252 *

Paris traffic at a standstill around the Arc De Triumph *

252A INT. OLYMPIA THEATER'S ORNATE LOBBY - DAY 252A

Joe Adams, Jeff try to protect Ray as FOUR GENDARMES (4) fight through a throng of hysterical French fans.

253 INT. EMPTY OLYMPIA THEATER- DAY 253

Joe and Jeff manage to get Ray inside the auditorium, muscling the doors closed against the screaming fans. Ray immediately slumps down into a seat in agony, a tiny figure surrounded by 1000 seats.

RAY
I've gotta get outta here.

JOE ADAMS
Whatda ya mean?

RAY
I mean go home...get the hell outta this stinkin' country!

JOE ADAMS
Ray we've got eight more 'sold out' shows.

RAY
I'm sick, man!...this food is killin' me!

Joe and Jeff look at each other - French food?

JOE ADAMS
Ray, I'll get the chef to prepare something special...you can't leave.

RAY
The Hell I can't. I'll die if I stay here..I'm goin' home - NOW!!

Holding his stomach Ray cries out in pain.

JOE ADAMS
(whispering, panicked)
What are we gonna do?

JEFF
I'll make a phone call.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: A BIG TRAY OF FRIED CHICKEN

RAY (V.O.)
(mouth full)
Ahmet, you saved my life, man.

254 INT. OLYMPIA THEATER \ BACKSTAGE DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT 254

Ahmet, Jeff, Joe sit with a Black expatriate, OSCAR, watching as Ray chows down on chicken, collard greens, biscuits.

AHMET
No, Ray, Oscar and Estelle did.

ESTELLE comes in carrying pork chops and more food.

ESTELLE
Po' chops that'll melt in your mouth!

RAY
Thank you, Jesus...pass 'em this way.

Estelle puts a chop on Ray's plate.

RAY
Brother Oscar, how long you lived here?

OSCAR
I came to Paris, in the thirties playin' with Louis Armstrong...loved it so much I sent for Estelle an' we stayed. I met Ahmet an' his brother when they was kids.

RAY
I didn't know you grew up here, Ahmet.

AHMET
We grew up all over the world...my father was Turkish Ambassador in six countries.

RAY
Say what, man?! What else you got in that trick bag of yours?

They all laugh. Then Ray gets serious.

RAY
It's great to see you, man.

AHMET
Same here. You're doing great, Ray.

RAY
Yeah, well you stated it all.

Ahmet smiles sadly...Their time has past.

CHORUS (V.O.)
I can't stop loving you...

CUT TO:

255 INT. OLYMPIA THREATRE \ PARIS - NIGHT 255

Ray's Rhinestone Jacket sparkles in the spotlite.

RAY
I've made up my mind, to live in memory of the lonesome time.

256 INT. SAM CLARK'S ABC OFFICES (1964) - DAY / MUSIC CONTINUES 256

Sam Clark shouts into telephone.

SAM CLARK
OK Ray, I've finally got religion: Billboard just declared you the #1 recording artist of 1962,"I Can't Stop Loving You" the top selling single, and "Modern Sounds" top selling album! It don't get any better than this!!!!

257 INT. ASIAN HOTEL \ DARK BATHROOM (1964) - DAY 257 *

Ray in hotel cooking heroin as he listens to Sam.

RAY
That's nice, Sam...

CLOSE-UPS OF JOE ADAMS: "Oregato, Tokyo", "Ni How Ma", Singapore",*-
"Goodday, Sydney"

258 OMITTED 258 *

CUT TO: *

259 EXT. HAZY VIEW OF L.A. BASIN - *'CAN'T STOP'* CONTINUES(B.G.)259 *

JOE ADAMS (V.O.)
You can see the whole world from up here, *
can't you Bea? *

260 EXT. EMPTY LOT \ BALDWIN HILLS - DAY 260

Della doesn't respond, walking around stakes in the ground, as Joe shows her and Ray the site for their new home. *

JOE ADAMS *
Over here, I'm havin' the masons build a *
fireplace 60 feet high so you'll have a *
two story living room.

Ray's bouncing with excitement, but Della is cool, distant.

RAY *
Whatda think, Bea?

DELLA *
It'll be awfully big.

JOE ADAMS
(proudly)
8500 square feet...come on Ray, let me
show you your office.

Joe leads Ray off. Della stands there looking lost as we hear:

THE FUNKY, BRILLIANT INTRO TO *"YOU ARE MY SUNSHINE"*. *

RAY (V.O.) *
The other night, as I lay sleepin', I
dreamed I held you in my arms.

261 INT. BATON ROUGE AIRPORT - DAY *"SUNSHINE"* CONTINUES(IN B.G.)261

A phalanx of Louisiana State Troupers wait as Ray and entourage come into the terminal from the plane. AN OFFICER salutes:

OFFICER
Mr. Charles, we're here to escort you and
your group to the State Capital where
Governor Jimmy Davis is waiting.

Ray realizes that there's a long ride and ceremony ahead and he needs a fix. He grabs Fathead's arm.

RAY
Where's the can? Jeff gimme my coat.

Jeff hands Ray his coat and Fathead leads him into the John.

JOE ADAMS
(trying to buy time)
Officer, I would like to inspect the limo that Mr. Charles is to ride in.
(confidentially to Jeff)
Get them out of there.

As the Officer leads Joe away, Jeff stations himself outside the bathroom. Dozens of Troopers mill about. Jeff opens door and sees*

262 INT. BATON ROUGE AIRPORT \ BATHROOM - DAY 262 *

Fathead is cooking a spoonful while Ray ties himself off.

JEFF
Man, you gotta get the hell out of here.

RAY
I ain't ready...I ain't ready.

Jeff closes door and turns around just as a big State Trooper wants to go in and relieve himself. Jeff blocks his way.

JEFF
Already two in there...and I'm next. *

TROOPER *
Hurry 'im up, I'm gonna piss my pants. *

AFTER A BEAT, FATHEAD AND RAY COME OUT. JEFF HEAVES A SIGH AND * USHERS THEM OUT TO THE CARS AS WE... *

CUT TO: *

CLOSE-UP: JIMMY DAVIS - SONGWRITER, POLITICIAN, SCOUNDREL.

GOV. JIMMIE DAVIS *
On behalf the great state of Louisiana...

263 INT. ROTUNDA OF LOUISIANA STATE CAPITOL (1964) - DAY 263 *

A stoned Ray holds onto Jeff - surrounded by legislators.

GOV. JIMMIE DAVIS
And of course, me personally, I wrote this great anthem, I present you, Ray Charles, with this proclamation making you an "Honorary Citizen" of Louisiana.

Everyone applauds.

RAY & RAELLETTS *
Please don't take my sunshine away...

The BRASS EXPLODES ON RAY'S SWINGING ARRANGEMENT AS WE CUT TO: *

264 EXT. RPM HEADQUARTERS ON WASHINGTON BLVD. - DAY 264 *

Now finished, the white, two story building is simple but impressive with a large parking lot next door for employees.

JOE ADAMS (V.O.)
This is your office, Ray...

265 INT. RPM HEADQUARTERS ON WASHINGTON BLVD. - DAY 265 *

Joe leads Ray and Jeff into a fabulous office.

JOE ADAMS
...there's a bathroom behind your desk, and a full bar on the South wall.
(opens connecting door)
And right through here is my office...

Jeff looks into Joe's office: It's as grand as Rays.

CUT TO: *

266 INT. RPM HEADQUARTERS \ RECORDING STUDIO - DAY 266 *

JOE ADAMS
This is our new 'state of the art' recording studio. Eight track mixing console, two recorders, mikes, the works.

RAY
(laughing, delighted)
No more payin' for studio time...we'll be chargin' ABC instead of vise versa.

JEFF
An' where's my office?

JOE ADAMS *
Near the band, of course. *

Jeff opens door and stares into a 'cubby-hole', an eighth the size of Ray and Joe's offices. *

267 OMITTED 267 *

MUSIC CONTINUES AS WE CUT TO: *

DELLA (V.O.) *
Ray Jr.'s on the divin' board... *

268 EXT. RAY & DELLA'S NEW HOME \ BALDWIN HILLS - DAY 268 *

Ray listens as Della, holding Robert, gives him play by play commentary of Ray Jr. and his baseball teammates in swimming pool. *

DELLA *
He bounces once, bounces' twice. *
(laughing) *
...there he goes! A perfect belly flop! *

Ray laughs as he HEARS the splash. *

RAY
Bea, do we have enough hot dogs...Jeff's gettin' the barbeque goin'... *

DELLA *
I picked up 10 dozen on our way home from the park...that should be enough?

RAY
With these kids, who knows?

The telephone Rings. Della reaches into Patio Door and grabs phone:

DELLA
Hello.
(hands it to Ray)
It's for you.

RAY
Hello...yes, I remember you.
(listen)
...dear God, NO!...Yes, I'll be there.

Della SEEING the strain on Ray's face goes to him.

DELLA
Ray, what is it?

RAY
(hanging up)
Margie's dead.

DELLA
Oh my God...how?

RAY
(deep pain)
...She O.D'd.

Ray sensing Della's hard stare.

RAY
I didn't start her, Bea. I swear, she never did dope while she was with me.

DELLA
(sarcastic)
Yeah Ray, you set a fine example.

Ray, not wanting to hear it, spins and starts inside.

DELLA
Whatda 'bout the baby?

Ray stops, stunned that Della knew about his and Margie's child.

RAY
You knew?

DELLA
(nodding)
His name's Charles Wayne.

RAY
He's with Margie's sister.

DELLA
Give me the address an' I'll start sendin' 'im money.

RAY
Already bein' done, Bea. Ev'r month.

For a moment all is bare in this long and complicated marriage.

WHITE OUT TO:

269 INT. SOME STAGE - ANYWHERE - NIGHT 269 *

REVEAL OF A GHOST LIKE IMAGE. RAY IN SPOTLIGHT - SINGING:

RAY
Born to lose, I've lived my life in vain every dream has only brought me pain, all my life I've always been so blue, born to lose, now I'm losin' you.

CUT TO: *

270 INT. RPM RECORDING STUDIO - DAY \ "*BORN*" CONTINUES(IN B.G.) 270

Joe Adams stands at the door checking musicians off a list as they come into the room. Jeff is helping the engineer mike Ray's piano when Fathead runs in late.

JOE ADAMS
You're late, that's a $50.00 fine.

FATHEAD *
I ain't late! *

JEFF
(stepping forward)
I give 'em a ten minute grace period.

JOE ADAMS *
Five after two, he's late. *

FATHEAD
Where's Ray?!

JOE ADAMS
You don't have to talk to Ray, you're talking to me.

FATHEAD
You can kiss where the sun don't shine!

Fathead walks away from Joe Adams.

CUT TO: *

271 INT. RAY'S RPM OFFICE - DAY "*BORN*" CONTINUES 271

Fathead storms in with Joe Adams and Jeff right behind him.

FATHEAD *
This fool's finin' me for bein' late!

RAY
What time you get here?

FATHEAD
Jes' now! The guys are still settin' up, man! Jeff never...

JOE ADAMS
(interrupting)
I'm not Jeff.

FATHEAD
That's a fact!

JEFF
Ray, you said, the band's my thing?

RAY
It is.

JEFF
(holding Joe's eyes)
Then Fathead, go 'head back to rehearsal.

FATHEAD
(conciliatory)
Ray, you know how it is, man. You've been there...been one of us...

Ray sits there stone-faced, inscrutable. Fathead leaves.

JEFF
You wanna tell me, what's goin' on?

JOE ADAMS
(answering for Ray)
We're running a business. I'm Ray's buffer with the band. I'm bad cop to his good cop. Ray don't have time to get involved in people getting to rehearsal on time, those day's are over.

JEFF
Ray, you remember 'bout my time in combat? I've seen men blow'd to bits, losin' their lives followin' orders...orders not given by some General, but by one of their own - a noncom...an' that's the way I've run this band...those people'll do what you ask, irregardless of how harsh you say it sometimes - 'cause I cut 'em a little slack here an' there. Yeah, I know you've thought I was soft for doin' it, but they need it. If you come in here with this "I'm runnin' a business", you're gonna lose some good people.

JOE ADAMS
There's musicians standing in line to play for Ray Charles.

JEFF
They might be, but not for long, once they get a taste of you.
(turns to Ray)
Ray, you're the leader...be one!

RAY
Jeff, this ain't the days when the eight of us worked the chitlin' circuit, I told you, when I bought Joe in...an' if you weren't so busy, buildin' that bowlin' alley, you would've heard me.

JEFF
(looking at Joe Adams)
So, you know 'bout that, huh?

RAY
Yeah, an' I'm wonderin' how you did it?

JEFF
You think I'm stealin', Ray?

RAY
If the Shaw Agency is goin' to give you part of the 10% I'm payin' 'em, they might as well leave the money with me.

JEFF
(to Joe Adams)
Why don't you leave us alone?

JOE ADAMS
Ray?

RAY
Step outside, Joe.

JOE ADAMS
(staring daggers at Jeff)
I'll be right outside this door.

Joe goes out and Jeff turns to Ray.

JEFF
I know that jealous bastard planted the lie, but I never have an' never would steal from you...I got a small business loan an' yes, Milt Shaw was payin' me a little extra above the salary you're givin' me - but I'm no thief, Ray.

Ray lays an envelope on his desk.

RAY
What 'bout this Jeff? A promoter swearin' you made side deals with 'im to split my overages...how could you do that, man, we were like brothers?

JEFF
If we were like brother's, Ray, why you pay Joe more than me? I've been takin' care of you, since Lowell Fulson.

RAY
You broke my heart, man.

JEFF
You know what man, you broke mine a long time ago.

Jeff walks out and Joe Adams walks in.

RAY
... and now I'm losin', youuuuuuu.

AS SONG ENDS WE CUT TO:

272 EXT. RAY AND DELLA'S NEW HOME \ BALDWIN HILLS - DAY 272

Ray Jr. is waiting outside as his father's car drives up. Joe Adams opens the door for Ray. Della walks out to the car.

RAY JR.
(excited)
Daddy, I made the All-Star team! You gonna come to the game?

RAY
(distracted)
I think I'm gonna be out of town, but tell 'em I'll buy the team uniforms.

Joe nods to Della as Ray takes her arm. She ignores him.

JOE ADAMS
Call me, if you need anything, Ray.

RAY
Sure thing, baby. *

DELLA *
(leading Ray to house)
Where's Jeff? He sick?

RAY
Jeff don't work for me no more.

DELLA
What?

RAY
...Jeff was stealin', Bea.

DELLA
(looking back at Joe)
Jeff? I don't believe it!

Ray walks away as we hear the Brassy intro of *"BUSTED"*. *

CUT TO: *

JOE ADAMS (V.O.) *
Bon Soir, Montreal... *

273 INT. RAY AND BAND ON STAGE - DAY 273 *

Same costumes, same set design, same old thing.

RAY
(singing)
My bills are all due, an' the baby needs shoes, an' I'm busted. Cotton is down to a quarter a pound, but I'm busted. I gotta a cow that went dry, an' a hen that won't lay, a big stack of bills that gets bigger each day, the County's gonna haul my belongin's away, cause I'm busted...

CUT TO:

274 INSERT: HYPODERMIC NEEDLE SUCKING COOKED HEROIN UP INTO SYRINGE: *

CASH WILLIAMS (V.O.)
Mr. Charles, Joe sent me to get you.

275 EXT. BACKSTAGE \ DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT 275

We SEE a slender, young, black man named CASH WILLIAMS, waiting. After a long beat, Ray comes out of the bathroom.

RAY
What's your name, again?

CASH WILLIAMS
Cash Williams.

RAY
You got a lot of money, Cash?

CASH WILLIAMS
Not much. *

RAY
Then why the hell they call you Cash?
(smiles, takes Cash's arm)
Now listen, when we get to Boston you gotta gather up all my stuff fast so we can nightail it off the plane. I like bein' the first one at the hotel, dig?

CASH WILLIAMS *
(intimidated) *
Yes, Mr. Charles.

RAY
Call me Ray.

CUT TO: *

276 EXT. LOGAN AIRPORT \ BOSTON (1964) - NIGHT 276 *

A light snow falls as Ray's plane taxies towards terminal.

PLANE STOPS. AS DOOR OPENS, CASH HELPS RAY OUT AND THEY DASH TO A WAITING LIMO.

CUT TO:

SUITCASE SPRINGING OPEN ON BED

277 INT. RAY'S HOTEL ROOM \ BOSTON - NIGHT \ MUSIC ENDS 277

Ray throws clothes out of his suitcase. Cash comes into room.

CASH WILLIAMS
(nervous)
Ain't nobody seen your overcoat.

RAY
D'ya 'member takin' it off the plane?
(off Cash's sheepish silence)
...that's probably where it's at.

CASH WILLIAMS
I'll go get it.

RAY
I'll get it my damn self!

CUT TO:

278 EXT. LOGAN AIRPORT \ HANGAR - NIGHT 278

Cash waits by the car, stamping his feet to stave off the cold. Ray comes out of the plane with his overcoat.

RAY
Got it...let's go.

CUSTOMS AGENT #1 (V.O.)
HOLD IT RIGHT THERE! U.S. CUSTOMS!

Two CUSTOMS AGENTS appear from out of the shadows.

CUSTOMS AGENT #1
...can I see some I.D. please.

Ray and Cash do as instructed, fish out I.D.s.

CUSTOMS AGENT #2
You just arrived from Montreal?

RAY
Earlier tonight...yes.

CUSTOMS AGENT #2
So why you getting back on the plane?

RAY
I forgot a book.

CUSTOMS AGENT #1
You come back here at 5:30AM for a book?

Ray nods 'yes'.

CUSTOMS AGENT #2
More likely you came back for some drugs...we know your history, Mr. Charles...so if you don't mind, we'd like to see that overcoat.

RAY
(ironic)
If I don't mind?

CUSTOMS AGENT #1
(taking Ray's overcoat)
Hand it over?

Ray let's them take it...he's an old pro...not hysterical.

CUT TO:

279 EXT. BOSTON, MASS. \ CHARLES STREET JAIL - NIGHT 279

Ray hides under his overcoat as Joe leads him through a gaggle of Reporters and Photographers to the limo. They speed away.

CUT TO:

280 INT. SAM CLARK'S OFFICE \ ABC-PARAMOUNT RECORDS - DAY 280 *

Sam Clark looks across the desk at Ray.

SAM CLARK
Ray, this isn't some judge in Indiana ...it's Federal. They could charge you with smuggling. Losing on something like that would mean real prison time.
(he's got Ray's attention)
We're gonna do everything we can, but...

It's beginning to sink in. Ray's in big trouble.

CUT TO: *

CLOSE-UP: A RINGING TELEPHONE - DELLA'S HAND LIFTS RECEIVER, BUT * RAY'S HAND COVERS HERS AND FORCES IT BACK DOWN.

281 INT. RAY AND DELLA'S HOME \ RAY'S OFFICE - DAY 281 *

Ray slouches at his desk. Della stands across from him.

RAY
I don't wanna talk to nobody.

DELLA
You can't hide out in here, Ray.

RAY
Why in the hell not?! This is my house!

DELLA
No, this is my house...you haven't been here more 'n 6 days since we moved in!

Ray jumps up and moves towards the bathroom, Della blocks him.

DELLA
You ain't gonna solve this with no needle! *

RAY
Leave me alone, Bea!

DELLA
No, I won't! You've driven away everyone * who ever loved you, an' surrounded yerself * with people who'll only tell you what you * wanna hear. Me and the children shoulda * left long ago. You don't care about us! *

RAY
What! I've given you an' 'em boys * everythin' you ever wanted!

DELLA
Oh, you've thrown money at us, but you don't know us...can't talk to us.
(before Ray can protest)
Ray Jr.

DELLA (cont'd)
waited all day to tell you he'd been named Most Valuable Player of his baseball team - your answer was, I'll buy the uniforms...I told him you couldn't be at his team's banquet...you weren't in the studio or on the road - it was 'cause, you were high an' I didn't wanna embarrass our son, by havin' you hoppin' 'round on dope

RAY
(suddenly weary)
I don't wanna lose you, Bea. I love you more than anything else.

DELLA
(suddenly angry)
That's a damn lie an' you know it! There's somethin' you love more than me, and all of the women you've slept on the road and all the dope you ever took!
(off Ray's look)
...your music...but Ray, if you keep usin' that needle, they're gonna take your music away from you an' put you in jail.

For the first time Ray looks frightened.

DELLA
So that's it, Mr. Ray Charles...is that 'high' worth losin' your music?

Della walks out. Deep in thought Ray gets up and moves around his desk. Suddenly, he trips on something. He leans down and picks up Ray Jr.s M.V.P. trophy. He feels it...recognizing what he's holding. Ray starts to weep, squeezing the trophy.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP: DR. FREDERICK HACKER, SILVER-HAIRED AND DAPPER, A VIENNESE DISCIPLE OF FREUD.

DR. HACKER
I think it's capital that you have decided to give up heroin, and I will testify on your behalf if you complete my program.

282 INT. ST. FRANCIS HOSPITAL \ HALLWAY (1965) - DAY 282

Dr. Frederick walks with Della and Ray who is continuously scratching, needing a fix.

RAY
I'll complete it, Dr. Hacker. I'm just so tired of this whole mess.

DR. HACKER
I'm a licensed Freudian Therapist. Perhaps we should start with an intense program of analysis.

RAY
(scratching his face)
The only person I can't fool is myself, Doc, so forget the head shrinkin'. I've decided to kick an' that's final.

DR. HACKER
Fair enough, Ray...but you don't have to do it all at once. I can give you a substitute to wean you off slowly so you won't feel so ill.

RAY
Absolutely not. I'm jes' plain stoppin'.

DR. HACKER
Alright Ray, but it will be very hard.

RAY
I'm expectin' it to be.

CUT TO: *

283 INT. ST. FRANCIS HOSPITAL \ RAY'S ROOM - DAY 283 *

Ray comes out of bathroom in pajamas. Della turns from the window. She lays Aretha's WHITE COVERED Bible on bedside stand.

DELLA *
You sure you wanna do this alone?

RAY
You said choose an' I did.

Della kisses Ray tenderly.

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

284 INT. ST. FRANCIS HOSPITAL \ RAY'S ROOM - DUSK 284

Ray sits in bed with a thermometer in his mouth. A empty food tray sits on the table. A nurse comes in and checks thermometer.

ST. FRANCIS NURSE
Everything seems normal.

RAY
This ain't bad.

ST. FRANCIS NURSE
(leaving)
Enjoy it while you can, Mr. Charles.

285 EFX SHOT: TIME TRANSITION: AN AERIAL SHOT AT DUSK OF L.A.'S285 * INDUSTRIAL WASTELAND WHICH SLOWLY DISSOLVES TO CITY AT NIGHT. *

286 INT. ST. FRANCIS HOSPITAL \ RAY'S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT 286

Ray is in bed asleep. SUDDENLY, he throws back the blankets and rushes into the bathroom, puking his guts out.

DISSOLVE TO:

287 INT. ST. FRANCIS HOSPITAL \ RAY'S ROOM - DAY 287

Dr. Hacker enters. Two male orderlies are trying to steady a weakened Ray, who is still wrenching in pain, from the toilet.

DR. HACKER
(to orderly #1)
It's been 52 hours...make sure you get an IV in him...he's got no liquids left.

Ray labors to breath as the orderlies help him up.

RAY
Let me sit up for awhile.

DR. HACKER
(nodding to orderlies)
How are you this morning?

RAY
(sitting painfully)
Is this par for the course, Doc?

DR. HACKER
Different people react differently.
(off Ray's nod)
...I spoke with the Judge in Boston today ...I updated him on your progress, and he's agreed to a 5 year probation.
(Ray smiles)
If you finish my program and agree to take periodic drug tests.

RAY
No problem...I know no one believes me, but I'm finished with dope.

DR. HACKER
(places letters in Ray's hand)
From your wife and children...also some business documents for you to read. People are asking when they can visit?

RAY
Not now. I stink. Everythin' stinks.
(blowing into his hand)
An' if my breathe smells anythin' like the taste in my mouth.

DR. HACKER
That's the toxins coming out through your pores. You've come through the worst. The physical reactions will pass in a few days. Then the mental cravings take over.

RAY
I'll beat it. I'm not doin' this alone.

DR. HACKER
(intrigued)
What do you mean...who else is here?

RAY
(tapping his temple)
My Mamma's always up here.

DR. HACKER
Oh? Do you talk to her?

RAY
Not really...she just taught me good, an' I try to remember what she said.

Before Dr. Hacker can react, Ray starts convulse again. The orderlies quickly rush him into the bathroom.

DISSOLVE TO:

288 INT. ST. FRANCIS HOSPITAL \ RAY'S ROOM - NIGHT 288

Ray tossing and turning. He lies on his back. He hears: THE SOUNDS OF THE COUNTRY: BUZZING INSECTS, DOGS BARKING.

CLOSE-UP: Ray opens his eyes. They're 'normal eyes'. He sits up and turns on the light. The hospital room is bright. Then he notices that the sheets are wet. He looks down next to him and there's a lump under the sheets. He slowly pulls them back and sees: GEORGE's DEAD BLUE BODY...wet from drowning.

RAY
AhhhhhhhAHHHHHHH.... Help.....

The nurse and orderlies run into the room and subdue the hysterical Ray. There's no one in the bed...but it's wet.

NURSE
Calm down Mr. Charles...it's OK, you just wet the bed.

Ray starts to regain some control, but he's shook.

DISSOLVE TO:

CLOSE-UP OF CHESS BOARD - RAY FEELS EACH PIECE TO DETERMINE THEIR IDENTITY AND POSITION.

289 INT. ST. FRANCIS HOSPITAL \ COMMUNITY ROOM - DAY 289 *

Ray plays chess with Dr. Hacker.

DR. HACKER
Checkmate.

RAY
(laughing)
Damn, you whipped my ass again...but every time I learn a little more...you not gonna beat me the same way twice.

DR. HACKER
Who's George?
(Ray looks up)
The nurse told me about your nightmares.

RAY
My brother...he died when he was four.

DR. HACKER
Where were you?

RAY
I watched it happen.

DR. HACKER
That explains it.
(Ray cocks his head)
'The curse of the surviving brother': survivors agonize over why they were chosen to live.

DR. HACKER (cont'd)
They've got to constantly prove their worth because they're living for two.

Ray runs his hands over the chess pieces...says nothing. *

290 OMITTED 290 *

DISSOLVE TO: *

291 INT. ST. FRANCIS HOSPITAL \ RAY'S ROOM -NIGHT 291 *

Ray paces around his room like an animal. He's fighting the mental cravings that makes him yearn for a fix. He rapidly chants the lyrics from *"Going Down Slow"*:

RAY
I won't be home no more...I won't be home no more...I won't be home no more...

He goes into the bathroom and runs cold water over his face. Ray * labors to catch his breath, then turns back into:

292 *RAY'S CHILDHOOD HOME - ARETHA'S ROCKING CHAIR IN THE CORNER.* 292

UNLIKE PREVIOUS DREAMS - THIS TIME EVERYTHING IS TOTALLY REAL.

Ray walks into his past. Again, his eyes can see. Everything is exactly the same as when he was a kid. *

RAY
I can see...I can see everythin'.

ARETHA (V.O.) *
You can't see a thing, boy...

Ray spins around to discover Aretha in her rocking chair.

RAY
Mama????

ARETHA
...c'mere an' sit down 'side me.

Ray goes over and sits next to her.

ARETHA (CONT'D)
You done made a mess, haven't ya?

RAY
(defensive)
I done what ya said - I made it on my own. *

ARETHA
Yeah, you worked hard an' you've accomplished a lot...but ya only heard my words, ya didn't get my meanin's. *
(touches him lovingly)
I was tough on ya 'cause I didn't want'cha to be no cripple. But you got so strong you pushed everyone away...an' that dope helped you do it...

RAY
Mama, the doctor says I been doin' things 'cause o' George.

ARETHA
Baby, you gotta stop blamin' yourself for George's death, it wasn't your fault...

RAY
(tears flowing)
I jes' stood there...I didn't do nothin'?!

ARETHA
You were only five...an' I was wrong to yell at ya. I was feelin' so much pain, I lashed out...I'm sorry, Ray.

Aretha takes a weeping Ray into her arms. They cry together.

JULIAN BOND (V.O.)
Today we are here to correct a wrong that was done to one of our native sons nearly twenty years ago.

293 INT. GEORGIA STATE HOUSE - DAY 293

JULIAN BOND stands before a filled chamber. A healthy Ray stands behind him with Della and their three sons.

JULIAN BOND
In 1961 Ray Charles was banned from performing in the state of Georgia, because he refused to play to a segregated audience. Thankfully, we have come a long way since then. Today Ray Charles is one of the most famous performers in the world.

Ray takes hold of Della's hand.

JULIAN BOND
He is an example of the American dream...a child of poverty who overcame the obstacle of blindness and the plague of drug addiction. So on this day, March 7, 1979 we, the duly elected representatives of the State of Georgia not only proclaim 'Georgia On My Mind' our official State song, we also offer Mr. Ray Charles a public apology and welcome him back to his home state.

The chamber gives Ray a standing ovation as he is escorted over to his band of mostly new faces. He sits at the piano.

RAY
(smiles into microphone)
I know y'all are 'spectin' me to play 'Georgia' for ya...but 'fore I do, I'm gonna sing somethin', that says exactly how y'all have made me feel today.

Ray counts it off - the band jumps into *'UNCHAIN MY HEART'*.

THE END

ROLL CREDITS
Note: *"GEORGIA ON MY MIND"* will play under credits after *"Unchain My Heart"*.